

# ISSUE 400 EXTRAVAGANZA!

THE WILDEST STORIES FROM EMPIRE'S LIFETIME

INTERVIEWS GONE AWRY • ON-SET ADVENTURES • NICOLAS CAGE'S HAUNTED FOREST

# EMPIRE

MAY 2022



**JURASSIC  
WORLD 3**  
UP CLOSE WITH NEW  
MENACE THE  
PYRORAPTOR

**MARVEL EXCLUSIVE**

# DOCTOR STRANGE

**IN THE MULTIVERSE OF MADNESS**

BENEDICT CUMBERBATCH POWERS UP FOR THE MCU'S TERRIFYING THRILL-RIDE

**THE NORTHMAN**  
VIKINGS UNLEASHED

**IVAN REITMAN**  
A LEGEND REMEMBERED

**SCREAM 6**  
THE FIRST WORD

**MICHELLE YEOH**  
BACK IN ACTION

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WELCOME TO ISSUE 400 of *Empire*. Yep, 400. It's a mighty big number, and over all that time we've certainly seen some stuff. We've been up close and personal with movies from Tim Burton's *Batman* to Matt Reeves' *The Batman*. We've journeyed onto sets from Pinewood to Perth. We've been to Jack Nicholson's kitchen (room). We've even seen attack ships on fire off the shoulder of Orion, though admittedly that was just when we decided to watch *Raiders* again.

So, to mark the milestone, we thought it would be fun to share 400 things that we've learned over the years. The nuggets of trivia, the insights, the sandwiches that Keanu Reeves likes best. Almost none of it will be useful, but hopefully it'll be more entertaining than our back-up idea: a giant *mise-en-scène* analysis of *The 400 Blows*.

If that feature isn't a multiverse of madness enough, we also explore a literal Multiverse Of Madness, thanks to our spectacular cover story. Doctor Strange's second solo MCU odyssey sees him encountering the Scarlet Witch, a minotaur, dinosaurs and multiple versions of himself. Pretty out-there, even for the Sorcerer Supreme. Fortunately, we have Sam Raimi, Benedict Cumberbatch and more to help us figure out what the Shuma-Gorath is going on. See page 46 for our world-exclusive report.

And because multiverse movies like company, another one has manifested too. *Everything Everywhere All At Once* is destined to be one of the cult hits of 2022 — not just for its head-spinning creativity, but for re-establishing Michelle Yeoh as an action star. On page 80, John Nugent talks to her and provides an inside look at a film I couldn't be more excited about. You'll be googly-eyed by the end.

Enjoy the issue.



*Wokest*  
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## SUBSCRIBE TO **EMPIRE**



This month's exclusive subscriber cover  
by Chris Mullen

TURN TO PAGE 29 FOR DETAILS ON  
HOW TO SUBSCRIBE

Marco Vitar

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# EMPIRE

WHAT WE'VE BEEN UP TO THIS MONTH

## PODCASTING WITH THE STARS OF FRESH



*Empire*'s Sophie Butcher sat down for a chat with Daisy Edgar-Jones and Sebastian Stan, the stars of buzzy new horror-thriller *Fresh*. Listen to the interview on the *Empire Podcast* — available wherever delicious podcasts are found.

## PETER CAPALDI DOES THE PINT OF MILK INTERVIEW



Peter Capaldi is this month's Pint Of Milk interviewee; after our chat, he sent us this selfie of his beloved *Dracula AD 1972* soundtrack. Find out who gifted him the vinyl — and why Brian Blessed punched him in the face — on page 28.

## TODD PHILLIPS PAYS TRIBUTE TO IVAN REITMAN



Sadly, the great Ivan Reitman passed away last month. Todd Phillips (pictured above, right, with the *Ghostbusters* director) wrote one of several heartfelt essays from admirers and collaborators for *Empire*. Read them all from page 74.

# CONTENTS



## TAKE 20

### 8 JURASSIC WORLD DOMINION

Meet the series' latest hero and its brand-new dinosaur. Only one of them is red and feathery.

### 14 REGINA HALL

A Q&A with the actor and host of one-third of this year's Oscars.

### 20 THE CONTRACTOR

Empire goes on set of the new Chris Pine film, in which he plays a bloke who takes a look at your boiler.

### 24 TRAILER TALK: CHIP 'N DALE: RESCUE RANGERS

In which Team Empire excitedly appraise the antics of two chipmunks. Not to be confused with the Chippendales, who are proficient neither at rescuing nor rangers.

### 28 PINT OF MILK: PETER CAPALDI

Talking dairy and *Dracula* with the man who was both Doctor Who and W.H.O. Doctor.

## FEATURES

### 46 DOCTOR STRANGE IN THE MULTIVERSE OF MADNESS

Benedict Cumberbatch, Sam Raimi, Kevin Feige and co guide us into the latest Marvel Studios slice of mania. Does this have the best title in the Marvel Cinematic Universe? The answer is yes, by the way. If you ask us, everything should be subtitled 'In the Multiverse Of Madness' from now on.

### 55 EMPIRE 400

Can you believe it? We've turned 400 with this issue, and to celebrate, here are 400 things we've learned in our lifespan as the world's biggest movie magazine. No. 401: A feature including 400 things we've learned will take ages. No. 402: Never rub another man's rhubarb. No. 403: Nobody knows who Barney Tahesco is to this day.

### 68 THE NORTHMAN

In The Multiverse Of Madness.

See? It just works. Anyway, Robert Eggers, the man behind *The Witch* and *The Lighthouse*, is doing his thing again. Strap yourselves in.

### 74 IVAN REITMAN

*Empire* bids a fond farewell to the late director — the king of the Ghostbusters — with contributions from those who worked with him, or were just inspired by him.

### 80 EVERYTHING EVERYWHERE ALL AT ONCE

AKA Michelle Yeoh In The Multiverse Of Madness. Actually, this one does apply, as Daniels whisk the action legend into their very own endless universe.

### 86 GODS AMONG US: JEFF BRIDGES

A deep dive into the glittering career of the man who played The Dude.

Above: What supreme sorcery is this? Benedict Cumberbatch returns as Doctor Strange.  
Below: "Come quietly, or there will be... trouble!" Peter Weller as RoboCop.

## ON SCREEN

### 30 THE WORST PERSON IN THE WORLD

Clearly not the worst person in the world, or the worst romcom.

### 32 THE BATMAN

Riddle us this — how many stars for the Bat?

### 44 PEAKY BLINDERS

The final series of Steven Knight's epic crime drama.

## REVIEW

### 94 ETERNALS

Chloé Zhao on her addition to the MCU.

### 102 THE RANKING: NICOLAS CAGE

Uncaging The Cage.

### 104 ROBOCOP

RoboLines by the man who wrote them.



Spine issue 393. Newsstand: "We passed away. Daughter's at college. She might as well be on the moon" is from *Transcendence*; The Last Knight. Sides: "Command, Knight 1. Switching to sideways, moving in" is from *Independence Day*.

# MARK KERMODE'S FILM MUSIC SHOW IN ASSOCIATION WITH **EMPIRE**

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A portrait of Mark Kermode, a man with grey hair and glasses, wearing a dark suit and tie. He is standing with his arms crossed. The background is red with white, stylized musical notes and sound waves swirling around him.

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# TAKE 20

THIS MONTH'S FILM MOMENTS THAT MATTER [EDITED BY BETH WEBB]

## No. 1 Keeping cool in the face of danger

### Carnivores on frozen lakes? It's no bother for **JURASSIC WORLD DOMINION** star DeWanda Wise

WHEN YOU JOIN the cast of a movie with the word 'Jurassic' in the title, there are certain muscles you need to build up. Your legs, for running from things that are scaly and hungry. Your arms, for hoisting a flashlight or flare. And, of course, your jaw — for enunciating the lengthy, complex names of all the beasts trying to kill you.

"I can say *Quetzalcoatlus*!" laughs DeWanda Wise, who is joining the franchise with new instalment *Jurassic World Dominion*. "But my focus was more on the character, so I didn't think a lot about the dinosaurs. Between now and when the movie releases, I will probably refresh my eight-year-old memory."

In case you're wondering what a

Quetzalcoatlus is (let's not get into how to pronounce it), well, it's a humongous, long-necked flying dinosaur which likes nothing better than to grapple with planes in mid-air. In *Dominion*, Wise's pilot Kayla will have a close encounter with one. Then, at ground level, she and series stalwart Owen Grady (Chris Pratt) will face down another hitherto unseen predator, the red and feathery *Pyraptor*, on a frozen lake. In this trilogy-topper, all the toys are out of the box, rampaging around the planet. There will be sprinting, there will be screaming, and, in this scene at least, there will be sliding.

It marks the action-movie debut of Wise, who had a small role in last year's *The Harder They Fall* but is best known for TV series *She's*





*Gotta Have It.* She was thrown in at the deep end, being dispatched to shoot *Dominion*'s lake set-piece over her first two weeks. "It was kind of wild, being thrust into that," she says. "You know, this is Baby's First Blockbuster! I'd come home with my hamstrings really hard; there's nothing like sprinting for multiple takes across a very slippery terrain. But Pratt really knows his shit. He knows all the intense technical things you have to hit, in addition to the performance, to sell the terror. I was like, 'Teach me, master!'"

With hamstrings restored to standard elasticity, Wise entered a new phase of the shoot, less overwhelming but equally wild in its own way, as she hunkered down with her cast-mates at a London hotel during quarantine, making new friends and picking up new hobbies. "I've sung around the piano with Jeff Goldblum. I have so many bottles of Two Paddocks wine [from Sam Neill's vineyard]," she marvels. "There are cast members I don't share screen

time with at all, but who I had the opportunity to get to know. It was super-super-surreal." She also got to hang around prehistoric creatures in less adrenalinised circumstances. Namely, a Pinewood soundstage decked up to look like a sprawling Maltese black-market dinosaur sale.

"There's nothing like being dropped into a space to go, like, 'Got it. I know how to walk now,'" she says. "This is Kayla's world. She's fresh out of the Air Force and her main thing is flying cargo: mostly dinosaur stuff, but it could be anything." There was plenty of "dinosaur stuff" on set, with the stage packed with animatronics, dino of every conceivable size and shape: some dangerous, some cuddly. "If you are even a little bit of an animal lover, even a smidge, it's just remarkable," Wise remembers of the experience. And she had one favourite, in particular. "I was shown the *Lystrosaurus* early and named him Leonard.



Main New dinosaur on the block: the Pteranodon joins the herd of giant predators. Above: DWanda Wise as pilot Kayla.

I would like to take him home. It's honestly wildly overwhelming, how much affection you can feel for this thing that you know logically is not real."

Leonard? Yes, Leonard. Finally, a dinosaur name that's easy to say. **NICK DE SEMLYEN**

**JURASSIC WORLD: DOMINION IS IN CINEMAS FROM 10 JUNE**



# No. 2

## Why Pinocchio is pulling everyone's strings

With three films due this year, we explore Hollywood's ongoing obsession with a small wooden puppet

PINOCCHIO, THE LITTLE boy who started off as a humble block of wood, never had it so good: there are three cinematic versions coming to life this year. *Pinocchio: A True Story*, a Russian animated feature by Vasily Rovenskiy, is out in May; Robert Zemeckis' live-action take, with Tom Hanks as Geppetto, is rumoured to hit Disney+ this summer; while Guillermo del Toro's stop-motion film reaches Netflix in December.

The first is a curio: the dubbed English release has *Pinocchio* voiced by a 54-year-old Pauly Shore. The trailer went viral in January, quickly becoming a TikTok sensation, with people imitating Shore's leathargic vocal performance. But it will hardly dent the timber tyke's reputation. 2022 is the year of the puppet, although that is a coincidental confluence. Zemeckis' one was announced in 2015; del Toro first mentioned him in 2008. "No art form has influenced my life and my work more than animation and no single character in history has had as deep of a personal connection to me as *Pinocchio*," the latter has said. *Pinocchio*, 1883's darkly fantastical children's morality tale by Italian satirist Carlo Collodi, is many filmmakers'

Clockwise from above: I'm your puppet; Guillermo del Toro; *Pinocchio* fans; Paul Thomas Anderson; and Robert Zemeckis.

white whale.

There's something about it that takes hold of film directors. 2020 saw the release of Matteo Garrone's beautiful adaptation, with Geppetto played by Roberto Benigni—who starred as the boy himself in his own 2002 version. Francis Ford Coppola tried and failed in the 1990s; Stanley Kubrick wanted a go in the late 1990s, even though he had already developed *A.I.: Artificial Intelligence*, a story about a robot boy which, during the writing stage, he referred to as 'Pinocchio'; Tim Burton was attached to one around 2012. There were reports of Paul Thomas Anderson making one for Robert Downey Jr., although that wasn't quite true, the director tells *Empire*.



"It was certainly a possibility," he says — they'd discussed it, but nothing happened. "I am a huge *Pinocchio* fan. I love *Pinocchio* as a story. I mean, who doesn't?"

Indeed, it's an exciting challenge for filmmakers. The book is episodic, and you need to take liberties with it to make it sing on screen, as Walt Disney's outlandish 1940 classic did. It is visually rich, teeming with wonderful creatures, lending itself to the myriad takes we're getting this year, and it is ripe for personal interpretation. Del Toro's film is set during the Mussolini era — a political adaptation which, he has said, is "not a film for all the family to enjoy". It doesn't have to be for kids.

*Pinocchio* has it all: morality, fantasy, social politics, loss of innocence, corruption, coming of age, fatherhood, and talking animals. It's catnip for creatives. Every year can be the year of the puppet. **ALEX GODFREY**



# No./3 NEXT IN THE SERIES

You fell in love with that incredible new TV show. And then it ended! Don't despair — **Boyd Hilton** recommends the sibling shows to watch next

## IF YOU LOVED... REACHER



### BLOOD DRIVE

(PRIME VIDEO/SKY STORE)

Prior to landing *Reacher*, big Alan Ritchson only had a couple of leading TV roles. This one from

2017 is by far the wildest. A campy over-the-top sci-fi romp with *Mad Max* stylings and lashings of gratuitous violence and nudity, one-series wonder *Blood Drive* stars Ritchson as an LAPD officer known as 'Barbie', who is forced to take part in a deadly car race in which the vehicles somehow run on human blood. It's set in an alternate version of 1999, and has barely any connection to reality, but it's a crazy good time and Ritchson's spectacular physique is deployed to the max.



### MOST DANGEROUS GAME

(ROKU)

*Reacher* showrunner Nick Santora specialises in crime dramas built around big macho dudes

doing violent stuff, with no-nonsense titles like *Hostages* and *Scorpion*. Recently he created two projects for abortive short-form TV platform Quibi (since acquired by streaming platform Roku) — a reboot of *The Fugitive*, and this slick, starchy, 2020 action-thriller series with Liam Hemsworth as the brilliantly named Dodge Tynes, a terminally ill ex-athlete who agrees to become the "prey" in a hunting game, and Christoph Waltz having a riot of a time as the psychopathic organiser of the hunt.



### LONGMIRE

(PRIME VIDEO/ITUNES)

The strong neo-Western atmosphere of *Reacher* has echoes in this series set in the moody environs of fictional Absaroka County, Wyoming. The show, which ran for six seasons and 63

episodes, stars Robert Taylor (Agent Jones in *The Matrix*) as small-town sheriff Walt Longmire investigating crimes with help from his Cheyenne sidekick Henry Standing Bear (Lou Diamond Phillips). With its understated wit, vivid sense of place, and deeply dignified lead character, *Longmire* is an atmospheric cult treat



### LUPIN

(NETFLIX)

If you're after stylish adventures featuring an impossibly tall dude who's also a crime-fighting genius, look no further than French superstar Omar Sy as Assane Diop in this hugely entertaining caper. *Lupin* quickly became one of Netflix's biggest foreign-language hits (until *Squid Game* came along). Like *Reacher*, Diop is an enigmatic figure as comfortable bringing criminal masterminds to book using his intellect as he is taking on ten thugs at the same time. And it's a giddy thrill watching him in action. **BOYD HILTON**

REACHER IS OUT NOW ON PRIME VIDEO

# No./4 The DCEU fights back

Batmen and eagles and pigs, oh my! We assess the key players in DC's Marvel-challenging new phase



### PEACEMAKER

John Cena's mercenary and his eagle sidekick will return after becoming HBO Max's most successful series ever. This shows promise for DC's other small-screen endeavours, which include a Penguin standalone series with Colin Farrell, and a potential *Suicide Squad* spin-off from James Gunn.



### THE 'KEOGHNER'

There's still speculation as to whether Barry Keoghan, as glimpsed at the end of *The Batman*, actually is the latest embodiment of the Joker. But Keoghan's track record of malice — from *The Killing Of The Sacred Deer* to *The Green Knight* — proves that he's up to the job.



### IVORY AQUINO

Trans actor Ivory Aquino's casting in *Batgirl* marks the first time a live-action feature-film adaptation of a DC comic will feature an openly trans character. She plays Alysia Yeoch in the film, best friend and roommate to Leslie Grace's pointed-eared protagonist.



### BATMAN

Keaton's Caped Crusader, last seen battling a giant rubber duck on wheels in *Batman Returns*, is back as part of a splintered-universe storyline in *The Flash*. Keaton reprising his character after 30 years is a surefire way to invigorate stalwart fans' interest in the upcoming standalone films.



### PB

Gear up for Big Pig Energy in upcoming animated caper *DC League Of Super-Pets*, which features PB the pig (Vanessa Bayer), who has the ability to supersize herself. Let's hope she doesn't go rogue or she could end up in Arkham Asylum.

BETH WEBB



Left: Daniel Kaluuya and writer-director Jordan Peele on the set of *Nope*. Right: Kaluuya wears a vintage Scorpion King crew hoodie.

# Saddle up for Jordan Peele's bad miracle

[FIRST LOOK] An exclusive fresh peek at the director's much-anticipated new ranch-set horror

JORDAN PEELE'S ELUSIVE new film, his third after the triumphant *Get Out* and brain-spinning *Us*, is another project veiled in Pentagon-level secrecy. The world has been poring over the trailer and every poster for *Nope* for clues. Perhaps the most unexpected hint can be seen in this exclusive new still, given to *Entirely* by Peele: a crew hoodie for much-maligned 2001 adventure movie *The Scorpion King*, as worn

by hero James Haywood (Daniel Kaluuya). What could it mean? More than the alien plush toys or inflatable-tube men, this piece of attire presents myriad questions. Is *Nope* set in the past? Is Kaluuya's Hollywood horse trainer an avid collector of Dwayne Johnson memorabilia? Will Johnson himself beam down from the vast, circular cloud hovering over the ranch as the hybrid scorpion-man ruler?

We'll find out this summer. But one thing we can be sure of is that *Nope* is a very exciting prospect indeed. It sees Peele and Kaluuya reunited five years after *Get Out* catapulted both into the Hollywood mainstream. Since then, both have won Oscars, Peele for his *Get Out* screenplay, Kaluuya for *Judas And The Black Messiah*. Now they're back together for a film that promises all the intrigue and terror of Peele's work to date, but on a grander scale.

Where *Get Out* and *Us* unfolded largely in shadowy interiors, *Nope* is set in the dusty Californian countryside, its characters—also played by Keke Palmer, Steven Yuen and Barbie Ferreira—exposed to what appears to be an alien invasion. But many questions remain. Is that a figure lying in the dust behind James? Is the whole alien thing a giant misdirect by Peele? What's making a horse on one of the posters fly? With James branding the event that's terrorising his home "a bad miracle", expect biblical levels of chaos. Maybe we'll get that Scorpion King cameo after all. **BETH WOOD**

**NOPE** @ MULTICINEMAS FROM 20 JULY

## No. 6 THE OSCAR FIRST-TIMERS

Here are the historymakers that emerged from this year's nominations



### FLEE

This animated documentary about a gay Afghan refugee's escape to Denmark is the first to be nominated in the Best Documentary, Animated and International Feature categories simultaneously. The film, which was executive-produced by Riz Ahmed, was co-written by its subject, Amin Nawabi (a pseudonym). Having scored multiple awards already, including a Grand Jury Prize at Sundance, could *Flee* score the hat-trick?



### JANE CAMPION

Continuing her pioneering career—she was the first female Palme d'Or winner, for *The Piano*, in 1993—Jane Campion is now the first woman to be nominated twice for Best Director. The first was in 1994, again for *The Piano*, when she lost to Steven Spielberg and Schindler's List. Now, she'll face off against Spielberg again, as her *The Power Of The Dog* competes against his *West Side Story*. Can Campion emerge the champion?



### STEVEN SPIELBERG

Speaking of Spielberg, this year's shortlist means he is now the first filmmaker to be nominated for Best Director in six different decades. That's one in the 1970s for *Close Encounters Of The Third Kind*; two in the '80s for *Raiders Of The Lost Ark* and *E.T.*; two wins in the '90s for *Schindler's List* and *Saving Private Ryan*; Munich in 2006; and Lincoln in 2013. Here's hoping he'll be up there in 2020 for 'Close Encounters 2: The New Batch'.



#### TROY KOTSUR

The *CODA* actor is the first male deaf actor to be nominated for an Oscar, after his co-star Marlee Matlin paved the way in 1987 as the first deaf performer to win Best Actress for *Children Of A Lesser God*. "I can still remember watching Marlee win her Oscar on television and telling friends I was going to get nominated one day and them being sceptical," said Kotsur in a statement, before describing the news as "a huge honour".



#### NOMINATED COUPLES

For the first time ever, two couples have made the nominations list: Kristen Dunst and Jesse Plemons make their Oscar debuts for their performances (as a married couple) in *The Power Of The Dog*, and Javier Bardem and Penélope Cruz are also up for their leading roles, the former in *Being The Ricardos*, the latter in *Parallel Mothers*. Unofficial sources say that if one wins, the other has to do the washing-up.



#### BEYONCÉ

Perhaps a bigger injustice than 'Dos Oruguitas' being the nominated song for *Encanto* over 'We Don't Talk About Bruno' at this year's awards is that this is the first ever Oscar nomination for 28-time Grammy winner Queen Bey. Still, better late than never. She's up for Best Original Song for her rousing anthem 'Be Alive', taken from the Williams family biopic *King Richard*.



#### KENNETH BRANAGH

The Belfast filmmaker has secured a spot in Oscars history this year, with his film's Best Picture and Best Original Screenplay nods making him the first person to be nominated in seven categories, including Best Director and Actor for *Henry V*, Adapted Screenplay for *Hamlet*, and Supporting Actor for *My Week With Marilyn*. He passes George Clooney, Alfonso Cuarón and Walt Disney, who only managed six. **Lazy. BETH WEBB**

# No./7

## "The Oscars is not a light day. There will be a lot of eyes on me"

[THE Q&A] With a career of raucous hits, from *Scary Movie* to *Girls Trip*, under her belt, **REGINA HALL** is embracing a new direction

A STALWART PRESENCE in American comedy, Regina Hall is taking charge behind the camera as well, with producing credits on two of her upcoming films: *Master*, a campus horror in which Hall plays one of three Black women talking on an all-white Ivy League school, and *Honk For Jesus, Save Your Soul*, a religious satire about a disgraced pastor (Sterling K. Brown) and his wife (Hall). She tells *Empire* about her passion for boundary-pushing stories and her most nerve-wracking gig yet: hosting the Oscars.

**What was it about *Master* that excited you?**

I like that it's about these three women's unique experiences and that my character Gail is very complex. I hope it provokes a conversation — there's something very powerful about people engaging with each other over different ideas.

**Why do you think that a horror film was the right framework for this story?**

With comedy, you can approach issues of race and it's not so in-your-face. With this film, which Mariama (Diallo, the film's director) called "a spooky drama", [the genre] worked because certain institutions, like this fictitious Ivy League school, are steeped in tradition and tend to bring out some of humanity's more unresolved, darker tendencies.

**You've been producing over the past few years — and served as executive producer on this. What kind of stories do you want to champion?**

I love that filmmakers are expanding on the stories that we tell and are mixing up genres. Years ago, you wouldn't do that. It was like when *Ally McBeal* came out [Hall was on the show in the '00s], nobody



had seen an hour-long dramedy before. Or *The Hangover* is both a mystery and comedy. It's interesting to see how we can push the boundaries of a story.

**You star in *Honk For Jesus, Save Your Soul*. What drew you to that film?**

From top: The boundary-pushing Regina Hall; With Amber Gray in upcoming horror *Master*.

I love the world of the megachurch. I find it so interesting. With my character Trinitie, it was important to show the complexity of her decision to stay, and the strain of keeping up with what you represent and believe in to the outside world.

**Sterling K. Brown plays your husband in the film. What was he like to work with?**

He really embodied the role; he's so talented and funny. I don't think that people know how funny he is because obviously he's an incredible dramatic actor. It wasn't an easy role; there's a lot of deep emotional work to layer into the character. But when we put

the clothes on we were just like, "Look at us." Performance-wise, it was so much fun.

**Your career has spanned multiple generations. Who is the character that you get recognized for the most?**

It depends on the demographic. I would say probably Brenda from *Scary Movie*, but then it was Ryan from *Girls Trip* for a while, and then a lot of people watched *Nine Perfect Strangers*, so for them it's Carmel. Then *Scary Movie* came back onto Netflix, so it was Brenda again.

**You're reunited with Kevin Hart for Netflix comedy *Me Time*. How would you describe your friendship at this stage?**

I love Kevin. He insults me constantly, just reminding me that I'm not attractive, like a brother does. I remember when we did *About Last Night*, he was always playing around and I was like [laughs]. "Fuck you, Kevin!" But he's lovely. I'm excited to see the movie.

**You're co-hosting the Oscars this year with Amy Schumer and Wanda Sykes. What did it feel like to get that call?**

I was very excited. I mean, it's scary as well. It's not a light day; there will be a lot of eyes on me. But I love Amy and Wanda as artists so I'm looking forward to creating an incredible night with them.

**Is there anyone that you're dying to meet on the night?**

I haven't thought about that yet. I think once that show's over and I've got some wine in me, then I'm all about meeting lots of people. **BETH WEBB**

MASTER IS IN SELECTED CINEMAS AND ON PRIME VIDEO FROM 10 MARCH

Here: Ghostface makes a "welcome" return in the *Scream* sequel. Below: Directors Matt Bettinelli-Olpin and Tyler Gillett.

# No./8 How do you requel a requel?



**The filmmaking duo behind the *Scream* reboot on ripping up the horror rulebook. Again**

WES CRAVEN'S *SCREAM* 2 shouldn't have worked, according to Tyler Gillett, the co-director of the franchise's latest instalment. "[Before seeing it] I remember feeling like there was no more gas in the tank, they'd already driven it so hard," he tells *Empire*. Yet when he watched it, it *did* work. "The challenge that Wes and Kevin [Williamson, screenwriter] were having in trying to live up to the expectations of the first film was playing out on screen. It was such a wonderful way to let the audience in."

Now Gillett and his filmmaking partner Matt Bettinelli-Olpin face the same challenge. After their reimagining of *Ghostface* hit big at the box office with both devoted fans and *Scream* newbies, an experience that Gillett likens to "a crazy dream we're waiting to wake up

from", they now have to follow up their requel with, well, another requel.

To create the meta microcosm that *Scream* 2022 existed in — new and legacy characters uniting to try and beat a new Ghostface at their own game — Gillett and Bettinelli-Olpin watched the previous four films on a constant loop. "We wanted to decode the DNA of what makes those movies something you want to return to again and again," explains Bettinelli-Olpin. "That's what we loved about them." For the next chapter, he says that the key is to continue to break all of the rules of horror, bar two. "*Scream* films have to be fun, and they have to be scary," he says.



"Everything else is just stuff."

The second film is still in the very early stages of development, but Gillett says that they're already thinking about how to challenge

*Scream* fans like never before. "This movie has to be willing to risk it all in order to subvert all of those expectations," he muses. "And we're so far down the rabbit hole of *Scream* movies, that it's all up for grabs at this point."

Could this mean another musical number in the high school cafeteria is on the cards, à la Craven's *Scream* 2? "I would love nothing more," laughs Bettinelli-Olpin. You heard it here first. **BETH WEBB**

**SCREAM IS COMING SOON TO  
BUY OR RENT**

[TREND REPORT]

## No./9 MOUSTACHE ORIGINS

**These bristling facial features have a story to tell**

WORDS BETH WEBB  
ILLUSTRATIONS BILL MCCONKEY



### HERCULE POIROT DEATH ON THE NILE

The origin story of Poirot's whiskers is addressed in his latest movie, and it plays out like its own epic romance, involving a war injury, a scar and a few comforting words from his wife. Could this be cinema's most sentimental soap-strainer?



### DR. IVO ROBOTNIK SONIC THE HEDGEHOG 2

"Papa's got a brand new 'stache." With those six words in a trailer, Jim Carrey, aka Dr. Robotnik, confirmed the ultimate facial-hair grow-up. What was once a simple affair is now a bushy monstrosity capable of making Brian Blessed blush.



### VICTOR SULLIVAN UNCHARTED

Mark Wahlberg's formerly clean-faced fortune-hunter Sully sports a tash in the film's closing credits, a nod to the videogame series' original character. At least Tom Holland has something to hold onto next time he falls out of a moving plane.

# No./10

## Inside the ads that look just like movies

**We investigate the pumped-up Super Bowl commercials with A-list clout**

CHUCK MEEHAN AND Brad Emmett are aware they got off lightly. After all, people who spend time in the vicinity of Dr. Evil himself typically find themselves eaten by sharks with frickin' laser beams on their heads. Instead, the architects of a recent Super Bowl advert reviving the character lived to see another day. "It was surreal," says Meehan, recalling the moment Mike Myers emerged on-set in full costume. Dr. Evil having not been seen on screen since 2002 (give or take a late-night USTV sketch or two). "My friends and I have been quoting Austin Powers

for over 20 years, so to suddenly have his arch-nemeses right there in front of us was kinda crazy."

The ad—in which the notorious villain vows to fight climate change, after learning that it's replaced him as the number-one threat to the planet—was created as a way of promoting General Motors' new line of electric vehicles. For Emmett, who pitched and developed the ad with Meehan, the idea worked because it felt true to the character. "We weren't just tapping into an iconic character for the sake of it," he explains. "It really does lean into Dr. Evil's persona, instead of just selling a product. We approached it like a trailer for a movie, as if it were a set-up for 'Austin Powers 4.'"

Myers was not the only A-lister to resurrect a fan-favorite character during this year's American football extravaganza: Jim Carrey's The Cable Guy also returned in a commercial for

Verizon, in which the manic tech guru marvels at the power of 5G internet ("So, somehow your home is magically connected to the information superhighway without miles and miles of *that*?" he asks, brandishing a bundle of wires). It's a trend that's been emerging for a few years now. In 2021, Wayne and Garth of *Wayne's World* reunited courtesy of Uber Eats (Mike Myers again). The year before, Bruce Willis embarked upon another explosive encounter as John McClane in promotion of a car-battery brand. Even Bill Murray has been in on the action, bringing back his character from *Groundhog Day* in a Jeep ad.

So, why is it all happening? "It's not just money," says an advertising-industry insider who worked on one such advert. "For actors, it's a potential proving ground that there's still an appetite for that character, in the hope that a reboot or sequel might get made." They point to





beer brand Stella Artois' 2019 advert that resurrected *Sex And The City*'s Carrie Bradshaw alongside *The Big Lebowski*'s The Dude. The spot's success, they believe, partly led to the existence of *And Just Like That...*, the *Sex And The City* sequel series that streamed in late 2021.

"The Super Bowl is seen by [almost] a hundred million people at once," adds Emmett. "There's something sexy about A-list actors wanting to be part of that. Back in the day, there was a sense with actors of, 'Oh, commercials,' he fake-groans. 'But that's gone away a little now.' He's not wrong. Super Bowl is no longer just a showcase of trailers for the year's biggest upcoming blockbusters. In another advert this year, Arnold Schwarzenegger and Salma Hayek starred as retired Greek gods in a spot for BMW, masquerading as a movie called 'Zeus' (a fake poster was even put out in advance), while last year, Timothée Chalamet dressed as

Edward Scissorhands in a Cadillac ad. It used to be that stars were reluctant to do such corporate endorsements, filming them for Japanese audiences but declining American spots out of fear it might dampen their credibility. In 2022, that's no longer the case.

"When actors sign on for roles in big franchise movies, they know their image rights will be used to sell a number of different products. It's just embedded in the culture more now," the advertising-industry source suggests, adding that these types of ads are a "win-win" for all involved. "For brands, since *Star Wars: The Force Awakens*, it's been obvious there's a nostalgic power in audiences seeing their old favourites again. For actors, there's visibility and almost status now in getting to do one of these ads."

There's an argument to be made that trotting out old characters for adverts threatens the

Above: We're football crazy... a host of famous faces and characters have graced the Super Bowl half-time acts in recent years, including Jim Carrey's Cable Guy, Bruce Willis' John McClane and Mike Myers' Dr. Evil. Keanu!

magic and mystique of beloved movies. Would *The Godfather* still be as beloved if Marlon Brando had starred as Vito Corleone in a commercial for Dolmio pasta sauce? Would *Titanic* lose some of its romantic shine if Leonardo DiCaprio were to resurrect Jack for an advert about life insurance? The huge response to Carrey's Cable Guy and Myers' Dr. Evil appearances at this year's Super Bowl (both characters were trending on Twitter during the event) suggests audiences aren't too concerned. In short, expect more at the Super Bowl in 2023 — like Dr. Evil's henchman Mustafa, it's a trend that looks tough to kill. **AL HORNBER**





# No. 11 How do you top *Normal People*?

## Lenny Abrahamson returns to the Sally Rooney-verse with **CONVERSATIONS WITH FRIENDS**

LENNY ABRAHAMSON HADN'T anticipated that *Normal People* would turn out the way it did. The adaptation of Sally Rooney's emotionally charged novel became the BBC's most-streamed show of 2020, earned international acclaim, and scored Abrahamson his first Emmy nomination for his work directing six out of the 12 episodes.

"It defied our most optimistic predictions," he tells *Empire*. Now he's doing another Rooney adaptation, her debut novel *Conversations With Friends*, and the pressure is on. "The expectations are always there, even if it isn't connected to a big success," he says. "It's like, will we do it justice?"

Where *Normal People* was a laser-focused love story, *Conversations* is bigger in scope. Set in modern-day Dublin, it follows student Frances (Alison Oliver) as she navigates relationships with best friend Bobbi (Sasha Lane), secret lover Nick (Joe Alwyn), and his wife Melissa (Jemima Kirke). With the story told entirely through Frances' eyes, casting the right person was crucial—and an opportunity to, as with *Normal People*'s Paul Mescal and Daisy Edgar-Jones, find an unknown

actor and propel them to stardom. Enter Alison Oliver, a young, Cork-born breakout star who makes her screen debut on the show. "The more people we read her with, the more perfect she was," Abrahamson recalls. Yet only one other actor could provide exactly the chemistry needed with Oliver to make Frances and Nick's story tick. "There was so much soulfulness in him," Abrahamson says of Alwyn's audition for the role. "It's an older man and a younger woman, and in

the novel, the power-balance can flip the less conventional way. It's often Frances who's the active force. Joe and Alison really found that."

*Normal People* broke new ground in its depiction of sex, helped by a pioneering approach to intimacy coordination. As *Conversations With Friends* also digs deep into themes of sex and affection, Abrahamson again worked with expert Ita O'Brien "on how to make actors feel safe whilst also giving them creative ownership of what's happening," he explains. "Having gone through the process with *Normal People*, that was something that felt really solid going into *Conversations*."

So the chemistry is there, the intimacy is there—but is it possible to recapture the same quiet, melancholy tone that made *Normal People* so mesmerising? It turns out that Abrahamson wasn't really trying to, aiming for an "affinity" with the 2020 show rather than creating an outright copy. "*Conversations* is that bit gnarlier as a story," Abrahamson explains. "There's clearly a family resemblance between the shows, but I feel like they're cousins rather than siblings." No matter how distant the relation, we're excited to meet the new member of the clan. **SOPHIE BUTCHER**



**CONVERSATIONS WITH FRIENDS WILL AIR ON BBC THREE IN MAY**

Clockwise from main: Nick (Joe Alwyn) and Frances (Alison Oliver); Frances with best friend Bobbi (Sasha Lane); Jemima Kirke (left) plays Melissa.





INTRODUCING...

## Suzanna Son

THE 26-YEAR-OLD WAS STREET-CAST FOR SEAN BAKER'S *RED ROCKET*

### ON BEING INVITED TO AUDITION

I was standing outside this Botox place [near Hollywood's ArcLight cinema], Sean was there with his wife, he handed me a piece of paper and said, "Would you like to audition in the future for something?" I did *The Florida Project*. And I was like, "Oh my gosh, yeah!"

### ON MOVING TO LA TO ACT

I didn't graduate college or finish my semester studying abroad in New Zealand, so I thought I'd try out LA. The flight was on the fourth of July, and I had negative \$500 in my bank account. I almost came home three days later because I missed everything. But my best friend said, "No, stay. Force yourself to go out with friends, to go out to a movie and just start to like LA." I'm so glad I did.

### ON BAKER'S DIRECTING STYLE

At first, I would just do a scene one way, but soon realized he wanted 40 different ways, so I would throw out a ton of ideas, and hopefully one would stick.

### ON PUTTING A STAMP ON HER CHARACTER, STRAWBERRY

All of Strawberry's clothes were mine, so that was fun, to pick through my wardrobe. I would journal as her too. Nothing went into the script, but it helped me.

### ON FUTURE ASPIRATIONS

I love anything by Luca Guadagnino. Maybe something scary, staying true to myself and doing music all the while. I want to do things that people might not expect me to do.

HANNA FLINT

RED ROCKET IS OUT NOW



# What the Non-Fungible Token?

## Empire delves into Hollywood's intensifying flirtation with NFTs

IN 1968, *Planet Of The Apes* first dropped its climactic bombshell on viewers, Charlton Heston's stranded astronaut realising with horror that apes had inhabited the Earth. In 2022, we now know how he felt. Since April last year, *The Bored Ape Yacht Club* — a key player in the world of NFTs — has risen from a baffling, peripheral development on the internet to a multi-million-dollar endeavour endorsed by everyone from Gwyneth Paltrow to Eminem.

The Bored Ape Yacht Club is probably the best, and worst, entry point into NFTs (non-fungible tokens). This limited collection of human-like monkey caricatures is comprised of individual digital artworks, bought via cryptocurrency and owned and traded exclusively online. It's like Pokémon cards, but for people with a lot of spare cash, and with greater risk; as with everything that pivots on cryptocurrency, NFTs' monetary values can plummet at any minute.

But why should film-lovers care about this? Because NFTs don't end with cartoon monkeys. There's no end to what can be sold as an NFT — from digital doodles to Lindsay Lohan's

original music — and Hollywood has caught wind of it. Quentin Tarantino has decided to release digitised pages from his original handwritten *Pulp Fiction* screenplay, along with personalised audio commentaries, as NFTs. Kevin Smith has turned an entire film — his upcoming horror *Killroy Was Here* — into an NFT, meaning that the winning bidder can do with it what they please. "Whoever buys it could choose to monetise it traditionally, or simply own a film that nobody ever sees but them," said Smith in a statement.

Yet Reese Witherspoon has taken the craze to another level, announcing a partnership between her production company, Hello Sunshine, and World Of Women, an all-female NFT collective. This means that her company can take World Of Women's tokens — a mix of trippy illustrations and fantasy figures — and turn them from online artwork into TV shows and movies.

With old movies' components being turned into NFTs, new movies being turned into NFTs, and NFTs being turned into movies, it could be only a matter of time before bored apes begin to infiltrate your movie screens. As long as Hollywood continues to claim a stake in this perplexing digital trend, you might want to brush up on your crypto jargon and prepare for monkey supremacy. **BETH WEBB**

Above: The cream of Hollywood are going non-fungible crazy.



# The Contractor

[ON-SET REPORT]

**Chris Pine “has gun, will travel” in this military thriller about a desperate soldier’s post-war fortunes**

**WHERE?** A field on the outskirts of Bucharest, Romania.

**WHEN?** After midnight on 28 November 2019.

**WHY?** To get the lowdown on *The Contractor*, a Chris Pine-powered actioner that follows a soldier returning from war to find his fighting is not quite over. Formerly known as *Violence Of Action*, it sees Pine’s ex-Green Beret, James Harper, desperate for cash. There will be action. There will be violence. There will be contracting.

**WHAT DID WE SEE?** First and foremost: a dilapidated farmhouse being blown to smithereens. Okay, not quite smithereens—but not far off. The scene we’re here to witness finds Harper holed up in a vast, crumbling ranch while snipers move in. As director Tarik Saleh calls, “Action!” Pine’s stunt double leaps from an upstairs balcony and shins down a nearby tree. His timing is excellent: moments later, stunt coordinator Jack Gill gives the nod, and three bone-shaking explosions go off, shooting tongues of flame through every window, and making

*Empire* extremely glad we accepted the free ear plugs that were handed out. “The person that owns [the house] said they were fine with it,” Gill tells us, as debris showers the scorched ground. Good to know.

**WHAT’S IT ALL ABOUT?** Despite sequences like the one mentioned, *The Contractor* is far from your standard blockbuster fare. “The action will be great,” Pine tells us, “but I hope the emotional counterbalance will be equally resonant. It’s entertainment, but it’s also asking why we go to war, and what is the nature of war.” Pine says that Saleh has essentially made three films in one: “a family drama, an action movie and a thriller”.

Saleh has whittled it down to two films when *Empire* catches up with him: “This is *The Revenant* meets *Platoon*,” he says. “It’s full on!”

**WHO’S IN IT?** Gillian Jacobs stars as Pine’s wife, while Ben Foster and Kiefer Sutherland play fellow veterans-turned-private-contractors. Eddie Marsan’s in it too, but we’re not told much about his character, except that the now-severely-charred farmhouse belongs to him. Let’s hope he’s insured.

Alamy, Shutterstock, Marco Vilar

# BLACK IN FOCUS

**AMON WARMANN** chews over the main moment in Black film and TV this month



## THIRTY YEARS LATER, BOOMERANG REMAINS A PIONEERING BLACK CELEBRATION

THE FIRST TIME I watched *Boomerang*, I didn't fully appreciate it for what it was.

Sure, it was the movie that first educated me on the importance of coordinating my clothes (rest in power, John Witherspoon). And as the eccentric supermodel Strangé, Grace Jones certainly left an impression with her formidable screen presence. But the significance of the movie with regards to both Eddie Murphy's career and the Black movie landscape of the '90s was lost on the teenage Amon.

Many years and rewatches later, that's changed. Directed by Reginald Hudlin and with a powerhouse cast including Halle Berry, Robin Givens and Chris Rock (in his debut role), the tale of Marcus Graham—a womaniser who meets his match in Berry's no-nonsense Angela—is one of the funniest and most quotable films in Murphy's oeuvre. It's not just one of the best Black romantic comedies. It's one of the best romantic comedies, period.

Yet it's also much more. One of many reasons why *Boomerang* has stood the test of time beyond its potent romcom credentials is the world the movie takes place in. An all-Black cast playing successful characters while looking incredibly suave (Murphy



Back at ya: *Boomerang* (starring Eddie Murphy and Robin Givens), put through the critical wringer on its release in 1992, has proved an enduring romcom classic.

sure knows how to rock a mock turtleneck) is not something you saw often in the '90s, and it just emphasised how far ahead of the game this movie was.

In 1992, I wasn't the only one who didn't fully grasp what *Boomerang* was doing, but the white critics who took the film to task didn't have the excuse

of youth. Their reaction was so irksome that Murphy felt compelled to write an op-ed in *The LA Times* two weeks after the film's release. In it, he called out those who dismissed *Boomerang* as a fantasy because of the successful Black world that was depicted, while defending it against accusations of racism because of the all-Black cast. "For every step we inch forward, for each iota of progress, there always will be those trying to knock us back down, and there always will be some who cannot accept our success," he wrote.

There's something to be said for the fact that 30 years on, a movie that has next to no white characters is no longer a rarity. But the cultural bias that reared its ugly head then still pops up today, and the battle for equal treatment that Murphy demanded then is still needed now. That's why we still need more films like *Boomerang* to help push the needle in the right direction.

## CLASSIC PICK OF THE MONTH

42 (2013)

This earnest and inspirational biography is the film that introduced me and many others to the late, great Chadwick Boseman, who brings stoicism as well as righteous anger to American sports icon Jackie Robinson. His pairing with Harrison Ford's stubborn but shrewd Brooklyn Dodgers chief, Branch Rickey, works a treat, too.



Clockwise from main: Shoot to thrill — Chris Pine as ex-Special Forces soldier James Harper; Director Tarik Saleh and crew on set; Kiefer Sutherland as Rusty; Pine goes flying in the farmhouse explosion sequence.

**BEHIND THE CAMERA?** Saleh has experience on this subject, having interviewed Iraq veterans for a 2005 documentary about Guantanamo Bay. Additionally, ex-Special Forces medic Bert Kuntz is on set, offering Pine everything from weapons training to psychological insight. "There's a lot of me in [Harper]," Kuntz tells us. "I still get offered private security work, for substantial amounts of money. A lot of guys get out [of the military], get behind on bills, and take those offers."

**ANYTHING UNUSUAL?** In the wake of those three explosions, the crew are reminded of a certain '90s novelty rap hit. Trust us, you've not lived until you've stood in a burning Romanian field as I am watching a team of camera operators sing, "Boom, boom, boom! Let me hear you say, 'Wig-oh' — 'way-oh!'" **TOM ELLEN**

THE CONSTRUCTION IS ON PRIMA VIDEO FROM 8 MAY

Top to bottom: *Blade Runner*; *Black Lotus*' replicant; *Tomb Raider*; *The Witcher*; *The Nightmare Of The Wolf*; *Pacific Rim: The Black*; *The Black*; *The Ninth Jod* from *Star Wars*; *Vision*; Michael Cera in 2010's live-action *Scott Pilgrim Vs. The World*.

# No./14

## Hollywood's anime boom explained

**From *The Lord Of The Rings* to *Blade Runner*, the animation style is re-energising familiar worlds**

EARLY IN THE anime short 'T0-B1' from the anthology *Star Wars: Visions*, a robot boy takes a literal leap into his own imagination. In a seamless shot, he crosses the boundary between the real world and fanciful drawings, changing his own shape and the textures around him. Through anime — a style of animation, originating from Japan, that generally features big action, big emotion and highly stylised characters — director Abel Góngora reimagines classic *Star Wars* mythology via Osamu Tezuka's *Astro Boy*. The iconography is familiar, but the imagery is new. And now Góngora is set to lead a new anime adaptation of *Scott Pilgrim* for Netflix, executive-produced by Edgar Wright.

Those are just two of the many iconic Western properties being reimagined in this way, in a wave largely driven by Japanese and Korean studios. There's also *Blade Runner: Black Lotus*, which debuted last November, an LA-set spin-off that draws on the visuals of Ridley Scott's sci-fi classic, swapping Rick Deckard for a female replicant. "Advanced technology is such a hallmark of [*Blade Runner*], so telling a story

through cutting-edge CG feels highly apropos," says Sarah Victor, a series production executive. She adds that "expansive world-building plays to animation's strengths".

Also getting the anime treatment: feature film *The Witcher: The Nightmare Of The Wolf*, monster-centric series *Pacific Rim: The Black*, and adaptations of *Tomb Raider* and *Skull Island* (all courtesy of Netflix). Then there's *The Lord Of The Rings: The War Of The Rohirrim*, due in April 2024. A feature-length anime set 250 years before the original trilogy, *The War Of The Rohirrim* will serve as a companion piece to Peter Jackson's films, telling the story of Rohan king Helm Hammerhand, and presumably featuring plenty of wild equine action. Jason DeMarco, executive producer on the film and an anime head at Warner Bros. Animation, promises that going 2D will give Middle-earth a whole new kick. "There's a level of freedom that comes

with the idea that we are translating Tolkien's concepts into something as 'simple' as drawings that move," he says. "In a way, I feel it brings us back to the purity of playing inside our imaginations."

And that's where the beauty lies in these new takes on old stories. *Skull Island*'s monsters can become even more outlandish. *The Ride Of The Rohirrim* from *The Return Of The King* might soon look like a day at Ascot by comparison. Anime can open up familiar worlds in thrilling new ways; as long as respect is shown to what we love about those worlds in the first place.

KAMOLIE CAMPBELL



No./15

## LOCAL HEROES

WE BREAK DOWN THE UNLIKELY UK HOTSPOTS THAT HAVE DRAWN A RECENT WAVE OF A-LISTERS



## Nottingham

Who? Henry Cavill

Where? Warhammer World

Why? Cavill, a devoted fan of the Warhammer 40k table-top game, recently dropped into the company's head office. He has, according to a Warhammer insider, "the Halo keyword and a 2+ save". Who needs the ability to fly, eh?



## Welcome to BIRMINGHAM

Who? Tom Cruise

Where? Asha's Indian restaurant

Why? Cruise took a breather from Mission: Impossible 7 to drop by for a tikka masala with extra spices. He enjoyed the dish so much that he ordered it twice, which staff took as "the greatest accomplishment". Turns out he doesn't just have an appetite for action.



## WELLS

Who? Nicolas Cage

Where? Tramways Social Club

Why? Hard to say, although Cage did formerly own a house near Glastonbury, so is no stranger to Somerset. He also bought the whole club a round and posed for fan photos, earning him titles such as "cool dude" and "total legend" from patrons.

## North Shields A193



Who? Harrison Ford

Where? The Ship's Cat pub

Why? While shooting the new Indy film, Ford visited the coastal pub for lunch. "He was really nice to all the staff," said the manager, although it's rumoured he didn't appreciate Ford trying to pay with an ancient golden idol. **BETH WEBB**

No./16  
Shaking up the Disney princess

Rachel Zegler on her fresh, live-action spin on *Snow White*

HOW DO YOU bring Disney's first-ever animated princess into the 21st century? This is the task that Rachel Zegler — the star of the upcoming live-action adaptation of the 1937 classic — has not taken on lightly. "I think it's going to be really important for young people to see that woman in a position of power," she tells *Empire*.

The *West Side Story* breakout star is due to begin shooting the film later this year. Directed by *The Amazing Spider-Man's* Marc Webb, the contemporary fairy tale will expand on the music and story of the original film, with new songs from Pasek and Paul, the writing duo behind *The Greatest Showman* and *La La Land*. "It's less about, 'Someday my prince will come,' and more, 'Someday I'll be able to rule a kingdom with confidence and courage,'" she says.

Wonder Woman herself, Gal Gadot, co-stars as the Evil Queen, although Zegler teases that their paths may have already crossed — the latter makes her DC debut in *Shazam! Fury Of The Gods* in 2023, a film rumoured to feature a Gadot cameo. "I'm not going to say much, but this was not our first meeting," Zegler hints. What she can confirm is that this evil queen will be no archetypal villain. "[Gal's] got so many fresh ideas for what an evil queen really looks like, and what it means to be 'the fairest of them all,' which is what's at the core of our film," she explains. It looks like Prince Charming can take a day off; this progressive princess has got things covered. **BETH WEBB**

Top to bottom: *Snow White And The Seven Dwarfs* from 1937; Rachel Zegler, who is set to star in the 2023 live-action remake.



THE YET-TO-BE-TITLED SNOW WHITE MOVIE WILL BE OUT IN 2023

# Chip 'N Dale: Rescue Rangers

Unfiltered, uncensored, uncompromising trailer reactions from team **EMPIRE**

**Beth Webb (News Editor):** Do we have any certified *Rescue Rangers* fans among us?

**Ben Travis (Deputy Online Editor):** When I went to Disneyland Paris when I was seven, I got pictures with Chip and Dale. I was really excited, but I didn't know who they were. I just thought they were exciting chipmunks in hats.

**Joanna Moran (Photography Director):** My chipmunks were always Alvin, Simon and Theodore. It was never Chip and Dale, it was the other ones.

**Alex Godfrey (Acting Features Editor):** Chip and Dale were in *EastEnders*, I think. **Joanna:** This is Paula Abdul, and she had this song.

**Alex:** She had a pretty cool single in the 1980s called *Opposites Attract*, and the video was her dancing—possibly breakdancing—with a cartoon character called MC Skat Kat. He has a pretty meaty Wikipedia page considering he was just a cartoon character in a Paula Abdul video.

**John Nugent (Reviews Editor):** This seems like retro nostalgia for a very specific generation, right? Like, this is not stuff for actual kids today.

**Alex:** Is this a diplomatic way of telling me that I'm old, John?

**Beth:** I think it's got a younger appeal as well. The *Lonely Island* guys are on the voice cast, so it's very much tapping into an audience that enjoyed, among other things, their 'Dick In A Box' music video.

**Mike Cathro (Deputy Art Director):** I hope that song makes an appearance.

**Joanna:** So it's for young boys who smoke a lot of weed.

**Beth:** Yes, that as well.

**John:** I'm so excited to see Roger Rabbit here. Has he done anything since *Who Framed Roger Rabbit*?

**Alex:** I think he's been in prison.

**Joanna:** Surely there's going to be a Super Bowl ad next year starring Roger Rabbit.

**John:** *Who Framed Roger Rabbit* is the best film Robert Zemeckis has ever made. And I will stand by that.

**Alex:** Why do you hate *Back To The Future*, John?

**Ben:** I'm pretty sure you just said that you hate *Back To The Future*, John.

**John:** It's fun that it's kind of doing what *Roger Rabbit* did, which is bring together lots of disparate characters. It was one of the first meta, live-action, animated mash-up things.

**Sophie Butcher (Social Media Editor):** The tiny leather jackets here made me laugh.

**Ben:** So Chip was designed after Indiana



Jones, wasn't he? And Dale was basically Magnum P.I.?

**Jo:** He's very Tom Selleck, isn't he?

**Beth:** Right, we need to really stay in for this. This is when it really gets weird.

**Joanna:** Do you see buttocks here?

**Beth:** No buttocks, Jo. None of Judi Dench's human hands on the end of a cat's arms.

Although I think that would make sense here. **Alex:** I don't want to sound like a dickhead, but they do look better here than they did in actual *Cats*.

**John:** Do you think that these are Andrew Lloyd Webber-approved cats?

**Ben:** I believe that Andrew Lloyd Webber disapproved of the *Cats* film. Didn't he disapprove so much that he bought a dog?

**Mike:** This looks like one of those Korean news reports where they need to dramatise real events.

**Ben:** The face on this guy looks like Michael Cera.

**Beth:** I bet that's not an accident either.

**Joanna:** I think he looks like Mark Zuckerberg.

**Sophie:** Is this a reference to a film or a game or something?

**Ben:** I get the sense from this trailer that there'll be certain things that are L.P.s and certain things that are just made-up nonsense.

**Joanna:** This is sort of like a warlords computer game, right?

**Liz Beardsworth (Production Editor):** He looks like Ewan McGregor.

**Ben:** I think this is another Zemeckis reference. This is Zemeckis' *Beowulf*.

**Mike:** This looks better than the troll at the end of *Eternals*.

**Beth:** This looks like *Shrek* 2-era animation, which again probably isn't an accident. A lot of shit went down between Disney and DreamWorks over *Shrek*, didn't it? They're probably having a bit of a swipe here.

**Ben:** I've been so distracted by Seth Rogen's stoner laugh that I hadn't noticed that there's a *Monsters, Inc.* doorway in the background.

**Beth:** That's exciting.

**Ben:** This whole sequence has to take place in a literal uncanny valley, where everyone looks off and it's all the bad animation from over the years.

**Alex:** That's really funny. I've never seen that addressed in a film before, or anywhere other than on Twitter, where someone's just saying that it's shit.

CHIP 'N DALE: RESCUE RANGERS IS ON DVD & Blu-ray FROM 20 MAY

# No. 17

## Paapa Essiedu is stepping up



**With a buzzy new sci-fi TV show, the actor takes his place in the spotlight**

THANKS TO APOCALYPTIC time-hopping series *The Lazarus Project*, Paapa Essiedu's skill set has broadened considerably. The role — his most physical yet — required the actor to learn everything from handling guns to jumping off bikes. Yet there was one thing Essiedu couldn't nail. "Karaoke is not my strong suit," he tells *Empire* mournfully. "They really threw me in the deep end with that. I was like, 'Are you joking me?'" The scene in question sees his character George deliver the opening lines of R.E.M.'s "It's the End Of The World As We Know It" on a work night out, a musical nod to the show's premise. In the opening episode, George is recruited to *The Lazarus Project*, an organisation that jumps

through time to prevent world-ending events. Essiedu hails from a theatrical background, having taken centre stage in everything from *Hamlet* to *Romeo And Juliet*. On screen, he's risen up through supporting roles on some of the most enthralling British shows in recent years, playing Kwame, Michaela Coel's troubled best friend in *I May Destroy You*, and criminal scion Alex in *Gangs Of London*. This is the first time that he steps up as a leading man. "There was something unexpected about George," he says of his reason to take the leap. "Plus I'm a huge fan of [creator] Joe Barton's writing; I love his ability to have this dry humour present in something that pushes humans into extreme situations."

The role comes at a pivotal time for Essiedu. For starters, he returns to the violent streets of the capital in the second season of *Gangs Of London*. "I've never been invited back to do

Left: Young guns go for it — Essiedu as George in *The Lazarus Project*; "Do you know where the light switch is?" — George with Sarah (Charly Clive).



something before," he admits. "And [showrunner] Corin Hardy has got such a gory eye for detail, it never ceases to amaze me." Then, he has a mysterious role in Alex Garland's upcoming horror film *Men*. "He's exactly how you imagine him, his brain works in a very different way to the average person," he says of the director. "And there was a real force to the scenes that I shot with Jessie [Buckley]. Or should I say, Academy Award nominee Jessie Buckley. That's literally how she's saved in my phone." At the rate that Essiedu is going, it might not be long before he earns a similar title. **BETH WEBB**

**THE LAZARUS PROJECT WILL STREAM ON SKY MAX AND NOW TV'S EPIC!**



# No. 18

## What's in Bob's Burgers' special sauce?

As the cult animation goes feature-length, co-director Bernard Derriman breaks down the ingredients of its success

### IT'S GOT HEART

Over its 12-season run, this show about a scrappy family running a small-town burger restaurant has fine-tuned a balance of comedy and chaotic storylines with a sweet spot dynamic. "By the third season, I started to hear people say that it was their happy place," Derriman explains.

### IT'S GOT UNFUSSY ANIMATION

"Even though the characters are simple and crude, I think there's charm to them," explains Derriman. There's also one key rule for the show. "We try to avoid the characters smiling too much," he says. "If they're too happy, it can ruin the jokes."

### IT'S GOT CATCHY TUNES

With titles like "Two-Buttad Goat" and "You Got Beefsquatched," *Bob's Burgers* is famed for its musical numbers. Derriman says that the cast's improvisation often leads to the songs. "Someone will ad-lib, and one of the writers will say, 'Let's run with that,' and turn it into a song that exists within the story."

### IT'S GOT RELATABLE CHARACTERS

"I've grown into Bob," laughs Derriman. He also likens his kids to Tina, Bob's worrisome teen, and Louise, nine, who wears a pair of pink ears. "We get into the background of the ears in the film," he teases.

**BETH WEBB**

**THE BOB'S BURGERS MOVIE IS IN CINEMAS FROM 27 MAY**



# No./19

## The man who took us to other worlds

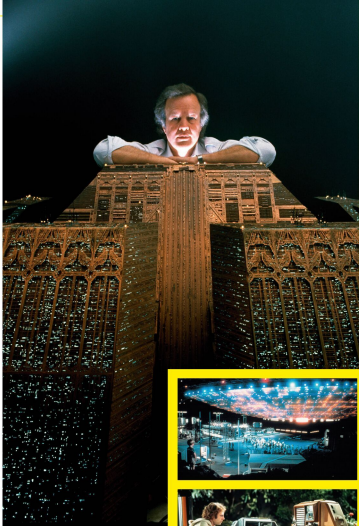
[IN MEMORIAM]

**Paul Franklin, Christopher Nolan's frequent VFX collaborator, remembers the late DOUGLAS TRUMBULL**

I WAS ABOUT nine, on holiday with my family somewhere in the US, when I stumbled across a mysterious sci-fi film, dubbed into Spanish for some reason, on the motel TV. I couldn't understand the dialogue, but that didn't matter — I was entranced by the images of a giant spaceship, containing the last dying forest, tended by a lone astronaut and his two-legged robot helpers. The film was beautiful, melancholy, and utterly compelling.

A couple of years later I saw *2001: A Space Odyssey* for the first time — these were the days before home video, so we watched a battered 16mm print shown in the sports hall of a local school. Despite the terrible projection, and not really understanding much of the story, I was dazzled — giant spaceships (again), alien worlds, a tunnel of shimmering light. In the credits I spotted a name I'd seen before, perhaps in a magazine like *Starlog*, or *Fangoria*: Douglas Trumbull. I discovered that not only was he the creator of 2001's astonishing Star Gate (and much else in the film), but also the director of that strange movie I'd seen in the motel, *Silent Running*. I started looking for more of his work.

I didn't have to wait long — *Close Encounters Of The Third Kind* was unleashed on the world in 1977, and while I wasn't sure about a sci-fi film from the guy who'd made the shark movie, having Doug Trumbull in charge of the effects made it a must-see. The film was extraordinary, magical, bringing the majesty of those earlier films into a "real-world" setting — it looked like the UFOs were really there, right in front of the cameras.



Top to bottom: Trumbull with models for 1982's *Black Runner*, for which he oversaw the visual effects; *Close Encounters Of The Third Kind* (1977); Bruce Dern in 1972's *Silent Running*, Trumbull's directorial debut; 2001: *A Space Odyssey* (1968).

When we were making *Interstellar*, Doug's work was a touchstone for us. Chris Nolan even asked me to give the black hole a little flicker, to give it the "Doug Trumbull 2001 optical look". Doug was a rare combination of master technician and visionary filmmaker, making visual effects an essential part of cinema. Last year, I was lucky enough to interview him for a BBC radio documentary. I felt like a beginner compared to his understanding of storytelling and effects.

Even at the age of 79, he was still innovating, still moving forwards. An inspirational man.





SMALL TALK

## DAVE GROHL

Hi Dave.  
How you doing?

I'm good. So, this is for *Empire*, so you can swear. Me? Swear?

I know, I know... My mother — my sweet 85-year-old mother, a public school teacher for 35 years, the most altruistic, brilliant, wonderful, loving, kind, generous woman of all time — still to this day has never said a swear word in her life. Never. Not "goddamn", not "bitch", not "fuck shit piss". Then she gives birth to me! And I make up for her long life of being such a sweet woman. I'm making up for lost time for the both of us.

**Have you ever sworn in front of your mum?**  
It took me until I was about in my twenties before I felt comfortable doing it. And because she was an English teacher, and a creative-writing teacher, and because she's so sweet, she once complimented me on how many swear words I could fit into one sentence while still being grammatically correct.

**Sounds like a challenge.**  
We used to have articulation drills, where she would give you a subject... [to] talk about for four minutes without breaking speech. It really makes you consider what's coming out of your mouth as you're talking. But fuck that shit! CHRIS HEWITT

STUDIO MIB IS OUT NOW

# No./20

## Madame Web is about to spin

Here's what you need to know about Dakota Johnson's superhero

## WHO IS MADAME WEB?

Introduced in *The Amazing Spider-Man* #210 back in 1980, Cassandra Webb — better known as Madame Web — is a mutant whose gifts include precognition, clairvoyance and astral projection. Various Spider-Man storylines have seen her aid Peter Parker and other wallcrawlers as a blind, elderly, stern woman hooked up to a life-support system resembling a web.

In the comics, Cassandra is killed off, but manages to transfer all her precognitive powers to Julia Carpenter — a version of Spider-Woman — who becomes Madame Web 2.0. Given Johnson's age, it's likely that she'll play Carpenter rather than opting for the old-age make-up. A passing-of-the-torch story could work nicely here.

### WHAT DOES HER FILM MEAN FOR SPIDER-MAN'S UNIVERSE OF MARVEL CHARACTERS?

That their Spider-numbers are about to drastically increase. Madame Web's connection to the Web Of Life And Destiny — a mysterious force which holds the multiverse together, believed to be the root power source of every hero with Spidey senses — gives her the ability to transport any version of Spider-Man across the multiverse.



Through Madame Web, we could see Tom Holland's Peter Parker, or the returns of Andrew Garfield and Tobey Maguire's versions of the character, or new heroes like Miles Morales enter the fray. Our own powers of clairvoyance predict me might even see Doctor Strange and Madame Web share the screen: both characters are able to tap into the multiverse, a useful skill given the universe-hopping shenanigans that are sure to continue. If a multiversal coalition of heroes is on the cards, having Web and Strange for teammates is no bad thing.

### WHAT ELSE DO WE WANT TO SEE?

This would be the first female-led superhero movie in Sony's Marvel Universe. But there are many Marvel women who deserve their big-screen due: not least Felicia Hardy, aka Black Cat. Felicity Jones played the character in *The Amazing Spider-Man 2*, but it was a tiny role with little impact. A solo film for the sometime antihero, sometime ally of Spider-Man could get into everything from her burglary skills and ability to bring bad luck, to the fact that she has a crush on our favourite Spidey. Would watch!

AMON WARMAN

Above: Madame Web's debut in print.  
Left: To be made flesh — or excelsior? — by Dakota Johnson.



# PINT OF MILK

## PETER CAPALDI

### Do you have a signature dish?

I can only do two dishes, but they're both very good. One is lasagne, which with my Italian heritage I'm very, very good at. The other is bread and butter pudding.

### When have you been most starstruck?

I met Al Pacino once; it was in Liam Neeson's dressing room when we were doing a play in New York, and Al came to visit Liam. He was very chatty. He was just so Pacino-esque. And I saw Barry Humphries once, sitting at a table next to me. I wanted to stare at him all the time.

### Do you have a favourite joke?

I like fast jokes. There was a guy who was robbing an Indian restaurant, and he fell through the skylight in the kitchen. He's been in a korma for three days.

### Do you have any scars?

I've got a scar under my eyebrow that runs the length of my eyebrow. That's when Brian Blessed punched me in the face. I got nine stitches.

### Why did Brian Blessed punch you?

We were filming the old BBC version of *Tom Jones*, and I was playing a fop in a powdered wig and make-up. He was playing a squire, from the country. I'd been attempting to seduce his daughter and in the scene he punched me, but he got a bit over-excited. I woke up on the floor with two ambulance men pulling at my powdered wig. I was wheeled off to hospital in my fop outfit, with a beauty spot. Poor Brian was absolutely distraught.

### How much is a pint of milk?

It depends what kind of milk it is, doesn't it? The landscape of milk has changed dramatically. We're now faced with a dizzying array – there's oat milk and pea milk and almond milk. Or is it semi-skimmed, or just regular colour? How would I know what the price of a pint of milk is? Do you think I do the shopping?

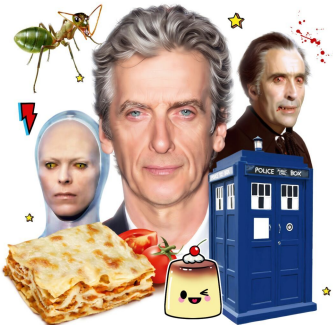


ILLUSTRATION: ARNO

### Do you do your own shopping? Are you a man of the people?

I think that's not an appropriate measure of whether you're a man of the people. The truth of the matter is, it gets delivered. But I do shop. I was already out this morning for kitchen rolls and cat food. I'm always in Budgens or the Co-op.

### Do you have a nickname?

No. At least, not to my face. They possibly do say all kinds of awful things behind my back.

### What scares you?

[Netflix horror show] *Archive 81*.

### What's the worst thing you've put in your mouth?

Green ants. They were both the worst thing and the best thing. They were on a pavlova cake at this fabulous restaurant in Melbourne called Attica, which we managed to get a table at for my wife's birthday. I had to deploy all the powers at my disposal – Doctor Who was in town, autographs would be given, selfies, everything. And they brought us a green-ant pavlova. And you think, "Really?" It feels bad when you put it in, but it was actually lovely.

### Which movie poster did you have on your wall as a kid?

*The Man Who Fell To Earth*, when it first came out. I must have been 14. It was a great poster.

### You're a Hammer fan. Did you have any Hammer posters?

I would have liked *Dracula A.D. 1972*, which is my favourite. It's so misjudged in so many ways. It's so brilliant because it's made by middle-aged men who grew up in Soho, drinking coffees and cappuccinos. They try to evoke '70s glam culture in a Tommy Steele kinda way. However, it must be said that Christopher Lee and Peter Cushing do the business. When I left *Doctor Who*, Mark Gatiss bought me the soundtrack on vinyl. CHRIS HEWITT

## COMING SOON

### THE DEVIL'S HOUR

2022

A six-(six-six)-part thriller about a woman who wakes up every morning at 3.33am, better known as the Devil's Hour. Capaldi will reunite with old *Doctor Who* pal Steven Moffat, who executive produces.

### PADDINGTON 3

TBC

There's been no official word as of yet, but with filming starting on the Paul King-less sequel this year, expect Capaldi's human Brexit, Mr Curry, to make another appearance.

BANDERLOCK IS IN CINEMAS FROM 20 MAY

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# ON SCREEN

18 MAR-  
11 APRIL

BIG SCREEN. SMALL SCREEN. YOUR REVIEWS BIBLE STARTS HERE

★★★★★ EXCELLENT

★★★★★ GOOD

★★★ OKAY

★★ POOR

★ AWFUL

[EDITED BY JOHN NUGENT]



[FILM]

## THE WORST PERSON IN THE WORLD



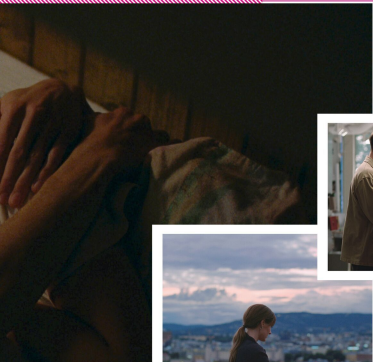
OUT 25 MARCH  
CERT 15 / 126 MINS

**DIRECTOR** Joachim Trier  
**CAST** Renate Reinsve, Anders Danielsen Lie, Herbert Nordrum

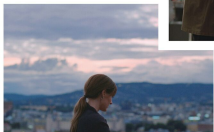
**PLOT** Julie (Reinsve) is on the cusp of 30 and struggling to find her place in the world. She changes jobs, changes haircuts, changes boyfriends to figure out which decisions make her feel most alive. Will her older partner Aksel (Lie) be enough to complete her, or is there still something missing?

LOVE STORIES IN cinema can struggle to find a complex middle ground between frothy entertainment and bruising drama. There's nothing wrong with either – but the real-life experiences we go through are much more contradictory than either extreme, full of mistakes and missed chances you just have to live with, as life goes on whether you're head-over-heels or completely heartbroken. Joachim Trier's Oslo-set romantic drama *The Worst Person In The World* isn't a love story in the traditional sense, following one relationship as it blossoms and either thrives or dies. Rather, it's an intricate, deeply emotional, intelligent exploration of how these relationships affect a woman going through them as she ages and grows more into herself in other ways, too.

"I feel like I never see anything through," Julie (Renate Reinsve) tearfully tells Aksel (Anders Danielsen Lie, Trier's muse since 2006) as she sees time running out for one of the most beautiful connections of her life. Her journey is one coloured by euphoria and



Clockwise from main: The happy couple? Aksel (Anders Danielsen Lie) and Julie (Renate Reinseve); A book-shop encounter with Eivind (Herbert Nordrum); Julie ponders new horizons. Time for a new chapter?



adrenaline as much as regret and guilt — all those electric feelings that come with daring to open up to another person bleeding into one another. Reinseve (making effectively her feature debut here; her only prior screen credit, Trier's *Oslo, August 31st*, gave her just one line of dialogue) balances these conflicting states of being effortlessly. It is so easy to love her. She has a supernova smile as warm as liquid sunshine, and eyes so curious and hungry that they sparkle with every question, every hesitation.

It's a tour-de-force performance, bolstered by a script so naturalistic, wise and organic that it can often feel like someone's been listening in

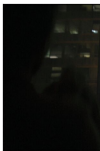
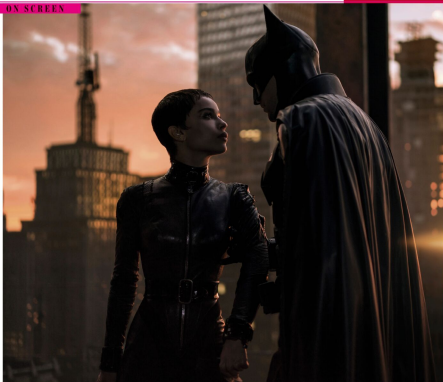
on those intimate conversations — conversations you might have had with a partner, the kind you haven't dared to share any further, the ones that keep you up at night and make your heart heavy. What am I worried about? Am I running out of time? Is the pleasure worth it? Can I really survive this pain? Was this a terrible idea? Of course there are no real answers, and even if there were, it's back to square one with every new person that enters your life and changes everything.

Trier telegraphs these emotions with unending vitality, toying with form as Julie wonders about her career and doubts her

feelings over and over again. The sexual tension crackles in a majestic slow-motion frame where cigarette smoke is passed from one open mouth to another (this is how we first meet Herbert Nordrum's Eivind, holding the beguiling yet delicate promise of a different future). Magic fills the air in another showstopping scene — a technical feat and a narrative marvel — where the whole city stops for as long as it takes Julie to sprint from one man to another for just one tender, urgent kiss. These unexpected pleasures coexist in a film teeming with spontaneous joy and unpredictable destruction — and despite these occasional fanciful set-pieces, Trier skillfully manages to avoid any kind of overly theatrical, unconvincingly grand staging. As a playful love-letter to uncertainty, it's far more accessible and watchable (the film's 12-chapter structure breaks down any potential heaviness) than it has any right to be.

Fundamentally, no bad decision makes anybody the worst person in the world. But the film takes incredible care to do justice to how devastating it can feel, how pleasure can turn into pain in a heartbeat, and how lightning-quick choices can stay with you for as long as you live. In telling Julie's story — not one of particularly mind-blowing singularity, and that's actually what makes it so affecting — Trier and Reinseve, alongside Lie and Nordrum, retell all narrative and romantic expectations. It gives us hope that, in the end, all of this — the thrill and the heartache and the easy love and awful sadness — is worth it. It's nothing short of a miracle. **ELLA KEMP**

**VERDICT** A truthful, tender masterpiece about how coming of age has no age-limit — love, for others and for ourselves, is what makes every risk and loss worthwhile. Rarely has a story like this been told as beautifully.



[FILM]

## THE BATMAN

OUT 4 MARCH  
CERT 15 / 176 MINS

## DIRECTOR Matt Reeves

CAST Robert Pattinson, Colin Farrell, Paul Dano, Jeffrey Wright, Zoë Kravitz, John Turturro, Andy Serkis, Colin Farrell

**PL0Y** Bruce Wayne (Pattinson) is only two years into his tenure as the masked vigilante known as the Batman when a serial killer who calls himself the Riddler (Dano) begins targeting high-profile figures in Gotham City. With the help of Lieutenant Gordon (Wright) and cat burglar Selina Kyle (Kravitz), Bruce must unravel the clues and stop a terrorist attack — while wrestling with his family's legacy.

BATMAN HAS BECOME Bat-ubiquitous. Gotham's protector is rarely far away from the screen; this year alone, there is the return of Michael Keaton's Bruce Wayne, the cinematic debut of *Batgirl*, and the animated *DC League Of Super-Pets*, which features Ace the Bat-hound, Batman's pet dog. He is everywhere. An icon. The challenge for *The Batman's* writer-

director Matt Reeves: how to make a totemic, mythic figure of pop culture feel new.

Reeves' approach, it seems, is evolution rather than revolution. Comparisons with Christopher Nolan's era-defining Batman trilogy are unavoidable — it shares Nolan's serious, neo-noirish tone, and one set-piece is reminiscent of *The Dark Knight* — but the difference to, say, *Batman Begins* is that this is emphatically not an origin story. There is, gratifyingly, no new recreation of Bruce Wayne's parents being murdered. Like *Spider-Man: Homecoming*, this is 'post-origins': a superhero still in his early years, grappling with youthful naivety and what his masked identity actually means.

So, in Robert Pattinson, we get a very different Bruce Wayne. Where Christian Bale and Ben Affleck embraced the macho side of the character, Pattinson looks like a boyish vampire, his skin tone only a shade warmer than in *Twilight*. His is the first screen Batman to be fully seen wearing the eyeshadow required of the character's costume, which evokes Robert Smith from *The Cure*. In the suit, he's methodical and muscular; out of it, he's racked with insecurity and self-doubt. A repeated needle drop of Nirvana's 'Something In The Way' confirms it: this is emo-Bats.

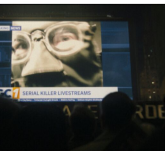
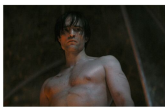
As a new direction, it makes total sense for this most brooding of superheroes. And though the humorlessness sometimes flirts with self-parody — Pattinson's narration, delivered like Rorschach's journal, grumbles mainly about



**Clockwise from main:** Zoë Kravitz as cat burglar Selina with Robert Pattinson as Batman; Pattinson minus his bat-suit; Rush hour in Gotham City; Paul Dano's Riddler livestreams his crimes; Colin Farrell as the Penguin.

vengeance, fear, justice, the usual stuff — the mood is justified by a believably dark bad guy. In a crowded rogues' gallery (shout-outs to Zoë Kravitz's instantly charismatic Catwoman and Colin Farrell's bafflingly convincing prosthetic Penguin), this is the Riddler's show, anchored by a chilling Paul Dano performance. He's a bespectacled terrorist of the Trump era, driven by an incel's misplaced sense of injustice and a love of fiendish puzzles. (And latte foam art.)

Fully embracing the 'world's greatest



detective" comics reputation that cinematic Batmen often forget, Reeves thus plays things out like a twisty, David Fincher-esque thriller. (Some of the Riddler's clues could have been ripped from the pages of the Zodiac killer.) Occasionally, the knottiness of the plotting will leave you feeling that near-three-hour runtime, but it is never boring, the narrative propelled by a series of grisly conundrums through Gotham's seedy underbelly.

What will also hold your attention is how beautiful that underbelly looks. Working with his cinematographer, Greig Fraser, Reeves has rendered perhaps the best screen realisation of Gotham so far; walking a careful tightrope between gritty realism and heightened pulp (lots of neon, lots of rainfall) without ever overplaying their hands. The result is some remarkable film craft, of a level rarely seen in modern blockbusters. Michael Giacchino's brilliant, minimalist score completes the effect, building on the hugely effective work of Hans Zimmer — evolution, then, rather than revolution. **JOHN NUGENT**

**VERDICT** Matt Reeves' arrival in the Bat-verse is a gripping, beautifully shot, neo-noir take on an age-old character. Though not a totally radical refit of the Nolan/Snyder era, it establishes a Gotham City we would keenly want a return visit to.



Noa (Daisy Edgar-Jones) always made sure to get her five a day.

## [FILM]

### FRESH



OUT 16 MARCH  
CERT TBC / 114 MINS

#### DIRECTOR Mimi Cave

CAST Sebastian Stan, Daisy Edgar-Jones, Jojo T. Gibbs, Andrea Bang, Dayo Okeniyi

**PLOT** Noa (Daisy Edgar-Jones) is thoroughly disenchanted with the dating scene when she meets charming stranger Steve (Sebastian Stan) in a supermarket. After agreeing to go away with him for the weekend, despite being warned against it by friend Mollie (Jojo T. Gibbs), she's shocked to discover Steve has some unusual appetites.

"HOPEFULLY IT WILL make for a good story", Noa (Edgar-Jones) tells best friend Mollie (Gibbs), as she psychs herself up for another first date full of awkward small talk, casual misogyny and ick-inducing sartorial choices. It's a required approach in the world of modern dating, where fearing for your safety feels as common as falling in love, and sometimes all you can hope for is an awful experience that makes for an entertaining anecdote. That's certainly what Noa gets when she falls for smooth-talking, self-deprecating, non-social-media-using surgeon Steve (Stan), finding herself — to use Mollie's word — "dickmatised" into going on a surprise weekend trip with him after only a couple of dates, and finding out what he really means when he says: "I don't eat animals".

*Fresh* is a film of two halves, built around a rug-pull for the ages (and an exceedingly gratifying delayed title sequence). The first act swiftly and effectively establishes Noa and Steve's connection, developed through brilliantly naturalistic chemistry and improvised banter between the two leads. Then, in a bold move reminiscent of Amy Dunne's 'cool girl' monologue reveal in *Gone Girl*, the film shows its hand, spiralling into more gory, pulp territory.

It walks the line between unimaginable

horror and knowing comedy with ease, much of which is achieved through Stan and Edgar-Jones' wholehearted commitment to both the tenderness and theatrics needed to buy in to all aspects of the plot. Stan in particular is having a ball, unleashing the kind of uninged energy we've seen most recently from him in *Pam & Tommy*, and Edgar-Jones manages to make Noa's reaction to an extraordinary situation completely believable, giving her enough edge and dimension to evolve the character way beyond a simple scream queen.

Mimi Cave's impressive first-time feature direction is also crucial to striking that genre-spanning tone, weaving in operatic, fantastical sequences with blunt cuts and scoreless action; her camera starts out fairly static, but shots swooping overhead and upside-down sneak in as Noa becomes more disoriented. Even before the big reveal, extreme close-ups on gnashing teeth, superbly edited meat montages and the increased volume of gulps and chews evoke a sense of sticky nausea, and the soundtrack's consistent stream of '80s bangers, poppy tunes and more classic instrumentals only enhances the emotional rollercoaster.

It's not perfect; a device involving Noa talking through a wall is chunky and unnecessary, Mollie feels underdeveloped and tropey at times, and it could be argued that the change of pace half an hour in is risky, and results in a loss of tension. The script's 'independent woman' moments and dating-related cynicism can be a little on-the-nose as well, as is the allegory around the ownership and objectification of female bodies. But if you don't take that element too seriously, and allow yourself to get swept along in the heightened absurdity of it all, *Fresh* is an eye-widening, stomach-churning, violent delight. **SOPHIE BUTCHER**

**VERDICT** It's as subtle as a sledgehammer, but *Fresh*'s audacious storytelling, full-throated performances and accomplished direction make for a tasty, wildly entertaining concoction. Deliciously deranged stuff from Mimi Cave and writer Lauryl Kahn.



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## THE SPINE OF NIGHT

★★★★

OUT 24 MARCH (SHUDDER) / CERT TBC / 60 MINS  
DIRECTORS Philip Gelatin, Morgan Galian King  
CAST Richard E. Grant, Lucy Lawless, Joe Manganiello, Patton Oswalt, Betty Gabriel

A deliberate throwback to a bygone era of Ralph Bakshi-style sword-and-sorcery animation, you can really feel the passion of this seven-year project. The realism of movement that comes with the arduous process of rotoscoping, combined with OTT bloodshed, hand-painted backdrops and vivid neon colours befits its curious fantasy narrative. It can be a little rough around the edges — the voice acting is flat in places and the characters can feel divorced from the painterly backgrounds — but such patches never feel intrusive. It will satiate the cravings of those who miss a particular brand of animated storytelling, updated with psychedelic fervour and lots of gnarly violence. **KC**



## EUROPA

★★★★

OUT 18 MARCH / CERT TBC / 72 MINS  
DIRECTOR Haider Rashid  
CAST Adam Ali, Svetlana Zaslavna, Erfan Rashid, Mohamed Zouaoui

Based on genuine 'Balkan route' testimony, Iraqi-Italian Haider Rashid's third feature is an innovative, immersive insight into the migration crisis. Opening credits exposing collusion between border guards, state governments and nationalist 'migrant hunters' pitch the viewer into the ordeal that befalls an Iraqi refugee on the Turkish-Bulgarian frontier. Barely a word is spoken, but Rashid fixes on Kamal in tight close-ups that highlight his isolation and vulnerability and make his encounters with corpses, gunmen, motorists and householders all the more disorientatingly tense. Mancurian Adam Ali is exceptional, as he strives to retain his humanity in the face of pitiless xenophobic depravity. **DP**



So this is why being a teenager is so complicated...

[FILM]

## TURNING RED

★★★★

OUT NOW (DISNEY+) / CERT TBC / 96 MINS

DIRECTOR Domee Shi

CAST Rosalie Chiang, Sandra Oh, Ava Morse, Maitreyi Ramakrishnan, Hyein Park

**PLOT** Toronto, 2002. Meilin (Chiang) is a confident and contented 13-year-old with top grades, great friends, and a loving relationship with her mum (Oh) and dad (Lee). But soon, bodily changes begin to kick in: when she gets overwhelmed or overexcited, Mei transforms into a giant, fluffy red panda.

IN SO MANY ways, Pixar's *Turning Red* — the feature debut from Domee Shi, the filmmaker behind Oscar-winning short *Bao* — is all about asserting a renewed identity. Chinese-Canadian almost-teen Meilin (Rosalie Chiang), aka Mei, has an assured sense of self, right from the off: she's an unapologetically dorky academic achiever who loves playing the flute, feeding her Tamagotchi, and pining over boyband 4\* Town (sample song: 'Girl, I Love Your Jeans'). But as puberty — and an additional spiritual transformation — rears its head, she changes; some of the old Mei is left behind, but the new Mei is a blast.

Shi's film offers a new identity for Pixar, too. For once, this is not a buddy movie. It's not an adventure flick either, resolutely a coming-of-age story from start to finish. The Ludwig Göransson score thrums and flutters like only a Ludwig score can. And the distinct visual style — incorporating anime speed-lines, face-filter emoji reactions, and a defiantly tween-girl pastel-pink sparkly sheen — means it looks unlike anything the studio has done before. *Turning Red* not only keeps Mei's experiences and emotions at the heart of the story; the entire film feels like it's filtered through her personality: ebullient and energetic and irresistible.

In typical Pixar style, *Turning Red*'s premise offers instinctual simplicity and wild invention. Pitched somewhere between *Eighth Grade*, *The Incredible Hulk* and *Scott Pilgrim*, it externalises Mei's inner transformation into an allegory for bodily changes and evolving interpersonal relationships. Overnight, she goes from parents' delight to literal raging hormone monster: when her magnified feelings of embarrassment, joy and anger manifest, she blows up into a giant red panda. For all the metaphors at play, Shi doesn't shy away from the specific realities of teen girlhood either, with a frankness that would be refreshing in any movie, let alone a Pixar one — during Mei's first transformation, she hides in the bathroom, her mother Ming (Sandra Oh) handling her sanitary pads as she assumes "the red poony" has bloomed.

*Turning Red* isn't just direct; it's frequently unexpected, too. Most tellings of this story might involve Mei trying to keep the panda secret. Instead, Shi's film is more about how Mei chooses to own this new side of herself, exploring the ways it impacts her relationship with her mum and her trio of ride-or-die besties, Miriam (Ava Morse), Priya (Maitreyi Ramakrishnan) and Abby (Hyein Park — a comedic standout).

Compared to the livewire opening half-hour, *Turning Red*'s middle act drags a little, pacing-wise, but the extraordinary finale offers an exquisite blend of spectacle and sentiment. While a climactic pop-concert kaiju battle (with pitch-perfect early-'00s pastiche songs penned by Billie Eilish and Finneas) offers real cinematic thrills, the moments that linger longest are the emotionally charged conversations and quieter personal revelations. Behind the burly exterior, the final reel is ultimately a dialogue between generations of Asian women — one which posits that the forces of familial love, self-acceptance and inherited destiny are as powerful as any boyband anthem. Long live the new Pixar. **GEN TRAVIS**

## VERDICT

A daring, distinctive and downright delightful debut from Domee Shi, and a welcome change of pace from Pixar. *Turning Red* is, appropriately, its own beast — and one that's easy to love.



[FILM]

## DEEP WATER

OUT 18 MARCH  
CERT TBC / 115 MINS

DIRECTOR Adrian Lyne

CAST Ben Affleck, Ana de Armas, Tracy Letts, Rachel Blanchard, Lil Rel Howery

**PLOT** Vic (Affleck) is a wealthy former tech designer, living in a marriage of mind games with his younger wife Melinda (de Armas). After a joke about a missing man – also a former friend-with-benefits of Melinda – arouses suspicion in his small-town community, Vic seemingly becomes embroiled in a series of murders.

ON PAPER, ADRIAN Lyne looked like a safe bet when it came to choosing a director to bring an erotic, psychological thriller like *Deep Water* to life. Based on the Patricia Highsmith novel of the same name – about a husband and wife, the lovers she takes, and the fallout of a lie about murdering her last paramour – it is exactly the type of story that the filmmaker behind *9½ Weeks*, *Indecent Proposal* and *Lolita* would be suited to. And yet, after a 20-year absence since

the release of his last film, 2002's *Unfaithful*, Lyne seems to have softened his edges.

The odd couple at the centre of this smalltown intrigue are Vic and Melinda Van Allen, played by Ben Affleck and Ana de Armas, who, after seven years together, have made a pretty iffy deal: she can have affairs with other men as long as she stays in the marriage for the sake of a daughter that only he seems to show much affection for.

That 'Sad Affleck' meme comes to mind every time the camera closes in on Vic's face while watching his younger, dissatisfied wife flirt around with pretty boys at various locations: a neighbour's garden here, another neighbour's pool there, even their own dining room. De Armas certainly doesn't endear Melinda to you, delivering her flagrant marital disregard with stunning viciousness and indifference to her husband's feelings. But even though she shows motherly distance towards their child, Evelyn, the underlying pain and frustration in her wide eyes do evoke empathy for a woman who feels like a trophy wife and might have been pressured into parenthood too early.

Affleck, on the other hand, seems miscast as the sort of mild-mannered cuckold who, after teasing the idea that he murdered his wife's ex-lover who disappeared, may just have developed his own dangerous, sociopathic impulses. Even when the narrative descends



into entertaining '90s-thriller levels of violent absurdity, Affleck is never convincing. He's unfortunately not as charmingly disturbing as his pal Matt Damon in the title role of *The Talented Mr Ripley* – another of Highsmith's psychopathic leading men – and as the movie hinges on this protagonist's movements, it's an underwhelming undertaking.

*Deep Water* couldn't be further from the glossy, Mediterranean aesthetic of Anthony Minghella's *Ripley* adaptation. Most of the action takes place in the expansive homes of a wealthy



Left: Vic (Ben Affleck) and Melinda (Melissa Leo) from *Van Allen's*. Above: Melinda from *Charlie* (Jacob Elordi). Below: Jude Fernandez as Jen, Tracy Letts as Don, and Rachel Blanchard as Kristin.

American community. That everything looks cold and clinical reinforces the Van Allens' frosty and inhospitable marriage — as does composer Marco Beltrami's melancholic strings in the score — but it also makes for a drab-looking film that reduces the potency of the sex scenes. They're tempered further by erratic editing, especially in moments where imagination and reality collide. Paparazzi photos of De Armas and Affleck from their brief relationship are believably horrier than most scenes. It is easily Lynne's tamest erotic thriller.

The script, co-written by Zach Helm (*Stranger Than Fiction*) and Sam Levinson (*Euphoria*, *Malcolm & Marie*) makes various changes from the original novel as a way to more obviously establish the potential for amorality in its male protagonist. An awkward garden party scene between Tracy Letts' intrusive pulp-fiction writer Lionel and Vic, discussing the latter's early retirement from selling a microphone for military use, is subtle but aptly lays the foundation for not only their antagonistic relationship but also for suspicion and paranoia to ferment. Yet the writers pull their punches by the final act and never follow through with Highsmith's shocking ending.

The Van Allens rarely function as more than stock characters in need of deeper introspection to warrant our attention, and it is really only through the sensual, kinetic performance of De Armas that any sense of passionate sentiment or nervous emotion is given life. The film is hindered by lackluster direction and a script barely willing to scrape the surface of what could have been an intense, psychosexual exploration of masculinity, morality and marriage.

HANNA FLINT

**VERDICT** Despite his erotic thriller credentials, Lynne makes a tepid return to the director's chair with a rather basic adaptation of an intriguing marital character study that Affleck struggles to enliven.

Crazy golf: Mark Rylance (far right) becomes an unlikely sports hero.



## [FILM] THE PHANTOM OF THE OPEN

★★★

OUT 18 MARCH  
CERT TBC / 102 MINS

**DIRECTOR** Craig Roberts  
**CAST** Mark Rylance, Sally Hawkins, Rhys Ifans

**PLOT** Barrow-in-Furness, 1976. Maurice Flitcroft (Rylance) is a shipyard crane operator facing the employment scrapheap. Inspired by watching the US Open on TV and encouraged by his supportive wife, Jean (Sally Hawkins), Maurice decides to enter the British Open — without ever having picked up a golf club in his life.

*THE PHANTOM OF The Open* is the kind of heart-warming, unlikely true-life tale that has become a mainstay of Brit cinema. Filed under the 'triumph of the underdog' sports-film subtext — see *Eddie The Eagle* and *Dream Horse* — Craig Roberts' third feature follows the template to a tee, but still comes up with a winning, likeable, zero-to-kind-a-hero tale. Adapted by Simon Farnaby from the non-fiction book he co-wrote with Scott Murray, *Phantom* shares the good naturedness that runs through Farnaby's *Paddlington 2* screenplay but lacks the tension and emotional heft to deliver a sucker punch.

The film follows shipyard crane operator Maurice Flitcroft (Mark Rylance, playing a kind of Paddington minus the duffel coat) who, approaching potential redundancy, took up golf, bagged his way into the 1976 British Open and became a quasi-folk hero for posting the worst round in the history of the tournament. Roberts sketches the Flitcrofts' family life in broad, voice-overed strokes before Maurice finds his true calling when he spots the US open playing

one of his TV's three channels, the moment delivered in charming lo-fi interstellar fantasy that sells the idea of this unlikely conversion. As Flitcroft starts his golfing odyssey, Roberts mixes visual pizzazz (fish-eye lenses) with crowd-pleasing gambits, be it training montages (there's more '70s needle drops than Radio 2), cute dog reaction shots and comedy golf kart chases. The you-can-lose-at-sport-but-still-win-in-life messaging is loud and clear; it's just all delivered in a scattershot manner.

The facts of the story are so inherently filled with quirk — inspired by Maurice's adventures, his twin sons (Jonah and Christian Lees) attempt to become world disco-dancing champions — you feel Roberts and Farnaby might have been better pushing against the whimsy. The closest the film comes to grit is in the relationship between Maurice and his social-climbing stepson Michael (a strong Jake Davies), the latter embarrassed by his stepdad's celebrity idiot status. There is a sharper film to be made here about the media's fascination with failure but Roberts plays it safer: even in its populist lark wheelhouse, the potential conflicts are delivered so lightly — the golfing establishment is represented by Rhys Ifans' caricature pompous prig — you fear the film might fly into the rough.

That it doesn't is down to Roberts' affection for his characters and the performances he gets from his central twosome. Sally Hawkins could play Flitcroft's wife Jean in her sleep but she invests the oft-used long-suffering spouse trope with warmth and empathy. Rylance is a funny likable dreamer but suggests other notes too — at the point where Maurice is sitting in his car at his lowest ebb, he gives *The Phantom Of The Open* soul. **IAN FREER**

**VERDICT** What *The Phantom Of The Open* lacks in ambition or dramatic oomph it makes up for in easy-going appeal. Anchored by an impish Mark Rylance, it takes its cue from the story's hero: a bit ramshackle, very amiable, always watchable.



## LUCY AND DESI

★★★

OUT NOW / CERT IBC / 103 MINS

DIRECTOR Amy Poehler

CAST Lucille Ball, Desi Arnaz, Bette Midler, Carol Burnett

Director Amy Poehler's documentary puts legendary sitcom stars Lucille Ball and Desi Arnaz on first-name terms, reflecting what is clearly hoped to be a more intimate portrait of the partners, in both romance and business, who accidentally changed television. Chronicling the pair's entire lives, this humbly darts through their remarkable achievements via fairly standard doc tropes (archive clips, home video, talking heads). That adherence to conventions leaves it feeling a little generic, and you sometimes wish Poehler — something of a comedy icon herself — had injected more of a point of view. But Lucy and Desi's story is undeniably captivating and romantic to the end; as Desi himself said, in posthumous remarks, "I Love Lucy was never just a title". **AM**



## ONE OF THESE DAYS

★★

OUT 18 MARCH / CERT TBC / 120 MINS

DIRECTOR Bastian Günther

CAST Joe Cole, Carrie Preston, Callie Hernandez, Cullen Moss

There is a great movie lurking under the bonnet of this strange, small-town American drama about what the economically deprived will do to win a new truck. A Texan dealership run by Joan (Carrie Preston), a bright spot) hosts an endurance test in which 20 people compete to see who can keep a hand on the truck for the longest, and the winner walks away with its keys. As sleep-deprivation and psychological disturbance kick in, writer/director Günther isolates moments that underline the perversity of the test. One participant keels over, another shuffles off crying. These potent vignettes fail to add up as Günther's decision to focus on desperate family man Kyle (a dazed Joe Cole), affording him a 30 minute post-climax flashback, tests the audience's own endurance. **SMK**



## RIVER

★★★★

OUT 18 MARCH / CERT U / 75 MINS

DIRECTOR Jennifer Peedom

CAST Willem Dafoe (narration)

From their birth in mountain glaciers to their death at the mouth of the sea, *River* is, in a way, a biopic, about the life of bodies of water. Jennifer Peedom's film combines astonishing cinematography with a poetic, unmistakably resonant voiceover from Willem Dafoe. Impressive drone footage captures the alien landscapes of global riverbeds from a safe distance, before swirling into POV mode for an eye-popping natural rollercoaster. Repetitive rhythms of pontification, followed by crescendoing montages, do make the film ebb in engagement. However a remarkable finale, colliding majestic visuals with a lush, anti-war lament from Radiohead, signals the brutal human damage to the environment, reminding viewers that for these rivers, plundered and exploited, there's an apocalypse, now. **JG**



## STUDIO 666

★★★

OUT NOW / CERT 18 / 106 MINS

DIRECTOR BJ McDonnell

CAST Dave Grohl, Jeff Garlin, Jenna Ortega, Will Forte, Leslie Grossman

This meta-horror/comedy from Foo Fighters is a genuine pleasure. It's largely a one-location film starring non-actors who show varying degrees of comfort in front of the camera. It could so easily have been a disaster. But director BJ McDonnell leans into everyone's strengths, giving the easy-going Grohl most to do as an ego-monster version of himself. There are extra layers in here for Foo fans, but this doesn't rely on in-jokes or even on self-parody for its laughs. At heart, it's a bunch of clueless rockers and an egotistical singer facing an evil beyond their comprehension, and that's a solid horror concept. In a very, very weird way, it's ultimately a love letter from Grohl to his bandmates, one written in guts and gore. And what could be more rock'n'roll than that? **HM**



## THE NOVICE

★★★

OUT 1 APRIL / CERT TBC / 94 MINS

DIRECTOR Lauren Hadaway

CAST Isabelle Fuhrman, Amy Forsyth, Dilone, Jonathan Cherry, Kate Drummond

Lauren Hadaway's stylish, self-assured debut roughly follows the recent trend for thrillers about obsession at the top; swap out the ballet shoes of *Black Swan* or drums of *Whiplash* for the cars of a female college rowing team and you're not far off. Interestingly, Hadaway worked as a sound editor on Damien Chazelle's film, and she brings an inventive, collage approach to editing and sound design here, reflecting her character's fanatical quest for rowing perfection. It doesn't entirely escape the pages of the psychodrama playbook (shots of trembling, bleeding hands are very *Whiplash*-esque), and character motivations are deliberately murky to a fault, but the nervy, wholly committed central performance from rising star Isabelle Fuhrman sells the psychological chaos. **AM**



## THE DESPERATE HOUR

★★

OUT NOW (SKY CINEMA) / CERT TBC / 84 MINS

DIRECTOR Philip Noyce

CAST Naomi Watts, Colton Gobbo, Andrew Chown

While out for a jog, widowed mother (Naomi Watts) discovers a mass shooting at her son's school; like Locke or last year's *The Guilty*, the resulting drama is played out — in real time — through phone conversations with unseen callers. A fine conceit on paper; in practice, it's all a little flat. Director Philip Noyce finds some tension in the panic of the unfolding events, but it is visually repetitive, spending most of the time with Watts running. That minimalist approach — which could so easily be an asset — instead feels cheap and often contrived. At one point, Watts' character calls 911 because she "doesn't want to be alone", which frankly feels like the misuse of the emergency services; meanwhile, the rogue gunman often seems to be less of a worry than a low phone battery. **JN**



Blond (Tom Burke) — how did he get that name?  
— with Kate (Ruth Wilson)

## [FILM] TRUE THINGS



OUT 1 APRIL  
CERT TBC / 102 MINS

**DIRECTOR** Harry Woolf  
**CAST** Ruth Wilson, Tom Burke, Hayley Squires

**PLOT** Thirtysomething Kate (Wilson) works in a dull-as-dishwater benefits office with a string of failed attempts at relationships behind her. Things begin to look up when Blond (Burke) rocks up to her desk and asks her to lunch. Despite knowing that dating a claimant is a sackable offence, Kate is besotted. The same can't be said for Blond.

**TRUE THINGS TELLS** a sadly familiar tale. Girl meets boy. Boy turns out to be a mendacious hellend. Girl sticks around. Harry Woolf's second feature lacks the emotional oomph of her debut, *Only You*, but delivers an imaginatively shot, well-played, low-energy character-study of a woman struggling to find the things (career, partner, kids) that seem to come so easily to others. Skewering Instagram-style life-idealisation, Woolf's non-judgmental film

posits the opposite of #relationshipgoals but without having anything really new to say about contemporary gender dynamics.

The union under the microscope is that of Kate (Ruth Wilson) and Blond (Tom Burke). Kate dreams of cunnilingus on a beach, has the domestic skills of Travis Bickle and is often late for work in a Kent benefits office. Blond is four months out of prison, doesn't care about where his cigarette smoke goes and flings out heavy words ("We're soulmates") with casual abandon. This couple don't meet cute — they meet ugly in Kate's soul-sapping work cubicle, and get together after a car-park shag, pub lunches and skinny-dipping in a lake. (While Ethan Hawke and Julie Delpy explored Vienna, Paris and Greece, Wilson and Burke get Ramsgate.) Woolf and Molly Davies' screenplay filters Kate and Blond's relationship through a catalogue of modern concerns — gaslighting, micromanipulations, toxic masculinity — but doesn't really offer a slant or take on the material. It has loads of compelling detail, but its centre feels a little bit hollow.

Away from Blond, Woolf sketches Kate's life in broad strokes, from vaguely disappointed parents (Elizabeth Rider, Frank McCusker) to her pas-aggal Alison (Hayley Squires does her best playing what is less a character, more a cheerleader for societal norms) to Bob (Tom Weston-Jones), a date set up by Alison, whose straight-arrow character ("We're not having sex

in my car. It's a work car") seems cack-handedly designed to reveal Kate's unshinged mindset and rationalise her obsession with Blond.

After *The Souvenir* and now this, Burke is rapidly becoming the poster-boy for Bastard Boyfriends. Geezerish and badly peroxide, Blond runs hot and cold like a dodgy tap, skilfully flitting between passion and detachment. Woolf finds striking ways to etch Kate's worldview, having her literally boxed in by a 1:33 aspect ratio, highlighting her disorientation with Ashley Connor's woozy visuals of crap seaside pubs, and using Alex Baranowski's skittering strings to suggest discomfort in her own skin. But some of the writing feels forced: on-the-nose fake-out dream sequences, the device of Kate passing off Blond's dialogue and thoughts as her own.


Wilson nails Kate's loneliness and misplaced optimism, but she can't make Kate's arc convincing. The movie ends on a sequence set to PJ Harvey's blistering 'Rid Of Me', which delivers a frisson and righteous anger the rest of the film can't muster. **IAN FREER**

**VERDICT** It says little that is new and lacks heat, but Wilson and Burke inhabit a compelling mismatched couple, with Woolf finding cinematic ways to get under their skin. A flawed but admirable attempt to take the temperature of a dark, modern relationship.

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A silhouette of a person holding a professional video camera, positioned on the left side of the frame. The person's head is turned towards the right, looking at a bright, glowing light source that creates a lens flare effect. The background is a solid, vibrant blue. The overall composition suggests a focus on filmmaking and visual storytelling.

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## COMPARTMENT NO. 6

★★★★

OUT 8 APRIL / CERT TBC / 107 MINS

DIRECTOR Juho Kuosmanen

CAST Seidi Haarla, Yury Borisov

A love story between strangers on a train: you can hear the comparisons to Ethan Hawke and Julie Delpy before it's even left the station. But there is very little cute about this meet-cute, and far less erudite repartee than in Richard Linklater's *Before Sunrise*. In the '90s, Finnish student Laura (Seidi Haarla) shares a compartment with vulgar Russian skinhead Ljoha (Yury Borisov); their first encounter is blunt and offensive (he asks her if she's a sex worker, she teaches him the Finnish for "Go fuck yourself"). But a mutual respect and even love blossoms. Juho Kuosmanen's direction is naturalistic and artful, making atmospheric use of the Russian winter setting, but this is as much a romance in the old-school Hollywood tradition — opposites, inevitably, still attract. **JN**



## THE OUTFIT

★★★★

OUT 8 APRIL / CERT TBC / 106 MINS

DIRECTOR Graham Moore

CAST Mark Rylance, Zoey Deutch, Dylan O'Brien, Johnny Flynn

First-time director Graham Moore chooses simple staging for an impressively constructed whodunit. It takes place in 1960s Chicago, where modest Englishman Leonard (Mark Rylance) runs a gentlemen's outfitters popular with local gangsters, who use his back room for covert business. When a Mob boss' son (Dylan O'Brien) gets wind of a mole, Leonard's shop becomes the place to trap the informer. Moore uses just one set and broadly drawn characters, but the film's staginess comes across as a deliberate choice. He sets the scene quickly then twists and reshapes his story across 105 tightly paced minutes, every line and cut chosen with absolute precision. Immensely satisfying, it will keep you guessing until the final moments. **CR**



It's a dog's life for Jackson Channing Tatum and Lulu

## [FILM]

### DOG

★★★★

OUT 16 FEBRUARY

CERT 12A / 101 MINS

**DIRECTORS** Channing Tatum, Reid Carolin  
**CAST** Channing Tatum, Jane Adams, Kevin Nash, Q'orianka Kilcher, Ethan Phillips

**PLOT** Former US army ranger Jackson Briggs (Tatum) is desperate to get back to the combat zone. His chance comes in an unusual deal — bring Lulu, a Belgian Malinois military working dog, cross country to the funeral of a fallen comrade and he can return to action. The only problem: Lulu is a feral killing machine.

**DOG ISN'T THE** movie you think it is. From its poster and tagline ("A filthy animal unfit for human company and a... Dog"), the joint directorial debut of Channing Tatum and long-term producing partner Reid Carolin appears to be a misadventures-with-a-mutt movie, full of shaggy shenanigans and heart, of the type that has been a mainstay of cinema since movies began. But while *Dog* certainly borrows licks from the sub-genre's playbook — a wet hound shaking water all over a posh hotel bed; two broken souls who heal each other — it shoots for a more interesting take, encompassing a portrait of a disenfranchised middle America and a more nuanced commentary on the life of post-war vets. The result is a mixed bag, held together by Tatum's easy-going charisma.

Based on a road trip taken by Tatum to California's Big Sur with his dog — also named Lulu — shortly before she died from cancer, *Dog* is essentially *Ruin Man*, with Dustin Hoffman replaced by a pooch. Tatum's former army ranger Jackson Briggs is itching to get back to battle — he has a "Bide Of The Valkyries" ring tone — but is stuck messing up orders in a sandwich shop, estranged from his wife Niki (Q'orianka Kilcher) and kid, all marinated in dark nights of

the soul fuelled by booze and pills. Lulu is a military dog triggered by any sign of combat, who relaxes watching videos of her greatest mailings but also has the comic timing to scupper "the most epic threesome ever".

The episodic, 1,500-mile road trip becomes a peg on which to hang a series of vignettes as Briggs attempts to deliver Lulu to the funeral of her former owner. As such, it's a meandering tale that relies too heavily on Briggs' monologuing to his canine charge, but Carolin and Brett Rodriguez's screenplay finds some character quirks (Kevin Nash's violent conscientious objector, Jane Adams' 'cat psychotic') and enjoyable set-pieces (Lulu uses her sniffer skills to track down Briggs' stolen belongings) to keep it engaging. Sometimes this means there are some bumps in time: a sequence where Briggs pretends to be blind while using Lulu as a guide dog belongs to a different, inferior movie. To Tatum and Carolin's credit, it is never mawkish, but it is never gut-wrenching either. The screenplay also never tellingly joins the dots tracing Briggs' emotional growth. It's easier to chart the dog's interior journey than the human's.

Lulu is by turns Adam Driver intense and Joe Pesci volatile, with the occasional touch of sly Owen Wilson laid-backness — her refusal to get into a bath is charm personified. But, unusually for a film about man's connection to animals, it's the man who steals the show. Tatum's unique blend of old-school magnetism and modern sensibilities keeps your attention, despite the thinness of the material, the actor as happy swanning around in a floral dressing gown or lip-synching "The Lion Sleeps Tonight" as he is with the macho military stuff. Fronting a film for the first time since 2017's *Logan Lucky*, Tatum gives an old dog new tricks.

**IAN FREER**

**VERDICT** More predictable than shaggy, *Dog* is more interesting than the standard man-mutt buddy movie but still never really pulls the heartstrings. What it lacks in urgency and emotion, Tatum more than makes up for in movie-star wattage.



An original plot twist, however into view.

## [FILM]

## UNCHARTED



OUT NOW  
CERT 12A / 116 MINS

**DIRECTOR** Ruben Fleischer  
**CAST** Tom Holland, Mark Wahlberg, Antonio Banderas, Sophia Ali

**PLOT** When orphaned bartender Nathan Drake (Tom Holland) learns that his long-lost brother has been on the trail of equally long-lost treasure, he teams up with grouchy mercenary Sully (Mark Wahlberg) to find both. Cue much running, shooting and jumping.

BACK IN 2011, for a promotional video, Harrison Ford sat down to play the third video game in the *Uncharted* series. "Fantastic. Oh, incredible," said the star, as he hammered the X button with his thumb. "So cinematic." It was a publicity coup — the actual Indiana Jones stepping into the pixelated shoes of his gaming equivalent, Nathan Drake. It was yet more evidence that *Uncharted* — a brilliantly executed PlayStation adventure franchise which is, yes, cinematic as hell — was destined to become a film series, too. But the ad also hinted strongly at the biggest problem facing anyone daring to take Drake to the big screen: the shadow of Spielberg's Indy films, the gold standard for movies about treasure-hunters dodging dusty booby-traps and falling out of planes.

After roughly 15 years of development, *Uncharted* the movie is finally here. Dusty booby-traps and plummeting from planes are present and correct. Alas, despite the promise and all that time expended, it's disappointingly weak sauce. For die-hard fans of the games, there's little that lives up to their ingeniously unfolding action set-pieces, such as the train sequence in *Uncharted 2* which builds and builds in intensity until a cliffhanger that involves

actual cliff-hanging, or the wild horseback gun-battle in part three. Non-Drakeheads, meanwhile, are likely to wonder what all the fuss was about. What's on screen is amiable enough, a hunt for \$4 billion of pirate booty that involves a lot of double-crossing (plus, thanks to the film's twin MacGuffin, a pair of crucifixes, a literal double-cross). But while it clearly aims for *Raiders Of The Lost Ark* — "When did you decide to become Indiana Jones?" someone says at one point, while our heroes' trek is depicted by a red dotted line on a map, Indy-style — it lands somewhere around *National Treasure 2* instead.

Over the years, the search to fill the two lead roles — Drake and his grizzled mentor Sully — cycled through pretty much every actor in Hollywood with a gym membership card. It finally landed on Tom Holland and Mark Wahlberg, two actors who can be charming and funny individually, but who struggle to muster up much in the way of comic chemistry here. It doesn't help that the dialogue they're given is significantly lammer than that uttered by their video-game counterparts; as they bicker in catacombs over ancient riddles (Wahlberg was at least well-cast in the sense that his resting expression suggests he is perpetually trying to crack an ancient riddle), scenes start to feel like cutscenes that you wish you could skip. Antonio Banderas, likewise, makes for a colourless villain, with monologues about "diversified investments" so inert that even his goons look bored.

There are moments when it jolts into life: a well-executed, lengthy single shot tracking Drake as he freefalls from an aircraft; some *Goonies*-esque underground map-syncing. But only the final 20 minutes, with a pirate-ship battle that takes to the skies, lives up to the giddy, inventive spectacle of the source material. Otherwise, *Uncharted* plods around an all-too-familiar map. **NICK DE SEMLYEN**

**VERDICT** A film based on a game inspired by films that are much better than this one, *Uncharted* is watchable enough but could have been so much better.



## KIMI

★★★★

OUT NOW / CERT 15 / 87 MINS  
**DIRECTOR** Steven Soderbergh  
**CAST** Zoë Kravitz, Devin Druid, Jaime Camil, Jacob Vargas

Steven Soderbergh keeps his post-retirement streak going with a character-driven, cerebral thriller, propelled by an excellent central performance from Zoë Kravitz, as an agoraphobic tech specialist who uncovers a murder, and a sturdily constructed script from David Koepp. In some ways a companion piece to Soderbergh's *Unsane*, it's the excellent, and expertly tense, second half of the movie that really motors with purpose, pitting Angela (Kravitz) against dark forces she never knew existed. A fascinating protagonist, Angela is resourceful, but Soderbergh and Koepp go out of their way to make us realise that might not be enough for her to make it out unscathed by the time we reach the climax. **CH**



## MARRY ME

★★★

OUT NOW / CERT 12A / 112 MINS  
**DIRECTOR** Kat Coiro  
**CAST** Jennifer Lopez, Owen Wilson, Maluma, Sarah Silverman, John Bradley

The wedding planner meets a wedding crasher; it feels like the big studio romcom never went away. Pop singer Kat (Jennifer Lopez) is planning a huge on-stage wedding to her equally successful boyfriend when he's caught cheating, and in a moment of madness marries amiable teacher Charlie (Owen Wilson) instead. Naturally, sparks fly. It's well shot, well cast and gently amusing in the way of such glossy romcoms; light on drama and heavy on beautiful people going for walks, attractively. Sometimes, that's enough — though there are hints that this could have been sharper than it is. With a catchy soundtrack and those two wily charismatic leads, in the weaker moments you can just follow Charlie's lead, and stare slack-jawed at J.Lo as she kills it. **HM**



Would you Adam and Adam it?  
— Ryan Reynolds' grown-up  
with his younger self, played  
by Walker Scobell.



Top to bottom: Old-school combat crisis; Adam with wife Laura (Zoe Saldana); Find a time machine, pronto.

## [FILM]

## THE ADAM PROJECT



OUT 11 MARCH (NETFLIX)  
CERT TBC / 106 MINS

**DIRECTOR** Shawn Levy  
**CAST** Ryan Reynolds, Walker Scobell, Zoe Saldana, Mark Ruffalo, Jennifer Garner

**PLOT** When rogue pilot Adam Reed (Reynolds), a time traveller from the year 2050, accidentally crash-lands in 2022, he finds himself face-to-face with his 12-year-old self (Scobell). Together, the pair head back in time, facing up to their past to save the Earth's future.

AFTER WORKING TOGETHER on last year's Truman Show-esque action-comedy *Free Guy*, director Shawn Levy and star Ryan Reynolds are back in the saddle, this time on an original sci-fi romp with a timey-wimey twist. Cinematic nostalgia is still the order of the day as we collectively continue to seek reminders of better times, and Levy's movie — based on a T.S. Nowlin spec script from 2012 — duly obliges, offering a throwback slice of escapism with plenty of heart.

Adam Reed (Ryan Reynolds) is a time-travelling pilot on a mission to find his wife Laura (a typically strong Zoe Saldana), who went missing under mysterious circumstances. Pursued by the villainous Sorian (Catherine Keener) — a vacuous big bad who exists almost solely to send baddies to their lightsabering doom — Adam crash-lands in the present day, where he makes an unlikely friend in his younger self (Walker Scobell). Merciless Reynoldsian ribbing, several opened cans of whoop-ass and some earnest soul-searching ensue as the two Adams search for Laura, fend off Sorian, and find themselves travelling back in time to meet their late father (Mark Ruffalo, giving *13 Going On 30* fans the reunion with an excellent Jennifer Garner they've desired), who turns out to be the inventor of time travel.

Working in the '80s Amblin tradition (echoes of *Back To The Future* and *E.T.* are rarely far away), Levy uses the fantastical conceit of *The Adam Project* to offer a film that's constantly searching for moments of emotional intimacy within the broader blockbuster framework. The genre's bread-and-butter tropes are all present and correct here — gigantic spaceships, pew-pews, vroomshes and high-stakes showdowns — though their application mostly serves as a reminder of a dozen other films that made better use of them. What plays to the director's strengths are the small, personal moments:

an overdue hug, a whispered apology or a simple game of catch. Levy's cinematic eye for otherwise innocuous details really leaves a lasting impression.

The real aces up Levy's sleeve here are newcomer Walker Scobell and Ryan Reynolds. 13-year-old Scobell — a *Deadpool* megafan — uncannily nails Reynolds' cadence and sardonic wit as a young Adam, commanding the lion's share of the film's big laughs. Opposite him, Reynolds — galvanised by a script that resonated with his own emotional response to losing his father in 2020 — digs deep to portray a man whose biting humour is used to hide a storm of emotions within. It's arguably his best performance since 2010's *Barred* (one scene with Garner, who plays Adam's mum, is a career best). When the film gives the two Adams space to work through their grief together, allowing Scobell and Reynolds to really explore the way loss shapes and reshapes us over the course of our lives, it's beautiful.

JORDAN KING

**VERDICT** Though a forgettable villain and some uninspiring set-pieces sometimes hinder *The Adam Project*, Reynolds and Scobell's cracking performances and the film's surprising emotional depth make it worth a look.

Top gun: Tommy Shelby  
(Cillian Murphy) is back.



[TV]

## PEAKY BLINDERS: SERIES 6



OUT NOW (BBC iPLAYER)  
EPISODES VIEWED: 3 OF 6

**SHOWRUNNERS** Steven Knight, Anthony Byrne  
**CAST** Cillian Murphy, Sophie Rundle, Natasha O'Keefe, Paul Anderson, Finn Cole, Anya Taylor-Joy, Sam Claflin, Amber Anderson, Stephen Graham, Tom Hardy

**PLOT** Criminal gang leader and MP Tommy Shelby (Murphy) tries to piece his life and business back together after the shattering death of his Aunt Polly. But Polly's son Michael (Cole) blames Tommy for her death and vows revenge.

THERE'S A LOT of heavy breathing in Series 6 of *Peaky Blinders*. The almost subliminal metronomic sound of a woman exhaling punctuates the soundtrack of key scenes, helping to create an atmosphere of impending doom. The breaths arrive in the first scene, which revisits the distressing climax of Series 5, with Tommy Shelby (Cillian Murphy) holding a gun to his own head. He survives, by accident rather than design, only to endure further episodes of mental anguish, accompanied by that eerie breathing. It's the sound of demons circling.

After the profoundly moving funeral of Helen McCrory's matriarch, Aunt Polly, which works as a magnificently poetic tribute to the late actor, there's a four-year time-jump to 1933, when Tommy has given up alcohol in an attempt to clear his mind of the dark thoughts that haunt him. But as he sets up an opium import/export operation, he's surrounded by dangers, not least from his cousin Michael (Finn Cole), who now hates him, and Michael's wife Gina (Anya Taylor-Joy), who

brings her scary uncle Jack (James Francheville) onto the scene. It doesn't help that Tommy's brother Arthur (Paul Anderson) is now a pathetic shell of a man, in a deep, drugged-up funk, barely capable of functioning.

In this series more than ever, it's up to the women, particularly Tommy and Arthur's sister Ada (Sophie Rundle – outstanding) and Tommy's wife Lizzie (Natasha O'Keefe), to keep everything going. Without them, the whole edifice of the *Peaky Blinders* would crumble. And the most valuable new arrival this season is undoubtedly Lady Diana Mifford (Amber Anderson), Oswald Mosley's lover. She's more formidable even than Sam Claflin's Mosley, as she shoots from the hip at anyone in her vicinity and soon becomes the personification of fascist decadence.

The way writer Steven Knight weaves these real-life historical figures into the narrative is partly why the show never feels like just another gangster saga. Tommy isn't a Zelig/Forrest Gump figure witnessing major events; rather, he's deeply embroiled in them as he tries to work out if his history of amoral violence necessarily precludes him from having any moral/political convictions.

It's a testament to the unique tone that Knight and his collaborators (especially director Anthony Byrne) have created that *Peaky Blinders* feels unlike anything else on TV. Somehow this British series, which started out on little old BBC Two, is consistently one of the most beautifully designed and visually spectacular shows out there. This is a series whose operatic grandiosity, ramped up by its gloriously anachronistic music choices, perfectly matches the egomania of its main players. He may have given up the booze, but Tommy is still ferociously addicted to the power he yields, reveling in his own charisma. And we viewers are powerless to resist. **BOYD HILTON**

**VERDICT** The beginning of the end of one of the great British TV dramas of recent years is as movingly intimate, emotionally ambitious and sweepingly epic as ever.



## THE DROPOUT

★★★★

OUT NOW (DISNEY+) / EPISODES VIEWED: 3 OF 8  
**SHOWRUNNER** Elizabeth Meriwether  
**CAST** Amanda Seyfried, Naveen Andrews, William H. Macy

Riding in on the crest of recent shows about financial scandal, from *Inventing Anna* to *WeCrashed*, *The Dropout* is a nuanced character study of Elizabeth Holmes, the world's youngest self-made female billionaire. Amanda Seyfried plays an ambitious entrepreneur who dropped out of Stanford University to helm a pioneering tech company. The show draws slowly to its inevitable conclusion – the real Holmes is currently awaiting sentencing for defrauding her investors – but not before presenting her trance-like pursuit of power mired by institutionalised misogyny and a deftly handled instance of sexual assault. Textured and tenacious, this is much more than simply a villain's story. **BW**

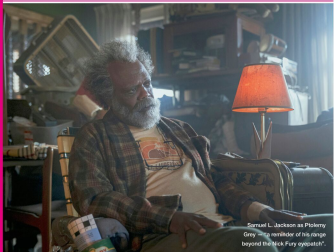


## STAR TREK: PICARD: SEASON 2

★★★★

OUT NOW (PRIME VIDEO) / EPISODES SEEN: 3 OF 10  
**SHOWRUNNERS** Akiva Goldsman, Terry Matalas  
**CAST** Patrick Stewart, Alison Pill, Michelle Hurd, Santiago Cabrera, John de Lancie

Omnipotent trickster Q (John de Lancie) returns to torment Picard (Patrick Stewart), as Jean-Luc and the crew travel back to 2024 LA. Picard's second season feels even more aimed at series stalwarts than the first, dropping familiar names (Gul Dukati! General Martok!) and faces (Guinan! Q!) with wild abandon. And while the core crew continue to be excellent company, the story beats are an awkward mixtape of *Trek*'s greatest hits. Between time travel to the present day, an evil alternate universe, and the return of The Borg, it's hard to get away from the fact that, while fun, these are all places we've boldly gone before. **JD**



Samuel L. Jackson as Ptolemy Grey — a reminder of his range beyond the Nick Fury eyepatch.

[TV]

## THE LAST DAYS OF PTOLEMY GREY

★★★★

OUT NOW (APPLE TV+)  
EPISODES VIEWED 6 OF 6

**SHOWRUNNER** Walter Mosley

**CAST** Samuel L. Jackson, Dominique Fishback, Walton Goggins, Cynthia Kaye McWilliams

**PLOT** Atlanta, Georgia. Ptolemy Grey (Jackson) is 91 years old and lives alone in squalor in his tiny apartment, his mind rapidly deteriorating. After teenager Robyn (Fishback) arrives in his life, Grey is introduced to an experimental procedure that could bring all his memories back — and give him a second chance at life.

SAMUEL L. JACKSON is one of cinema's most prolific stars. But his work in TV is vanishingly scarce — almost always limited to guest slots. Well, like buses, wait long enough and you'll get two major small-screen Jackson roles — Marvel's *Secret Invasion*, due later this year, and before that, this adaptation of the Walter Mosley novel.

By all accounts, it's a passion project for the actor, Jackson — who has campaigned for Alzheimer's causes, after the disease afflicted members of his family — also serves as executive producer here, having acquired the rights nearly a decade ago; this is clearly a story he wants to treat with respect. If you're used to him appearing mainly in post-credits sequences, looking cool and aloof, here is a reminder of his range beyond the Nick Fury eyepatch.

It's a gift of a part, spanning the senility and paranoia of the show's early episodes, through to the miraculous revival of the later hours as his treatment kicks in, with '70s-set, sun-dappled flashbacks in-between. He is both aged up and

down as a result, via convincing make-up and de-ageing CGI similar to that in *Captain Marvel* — but it's his ego-free performance which leaves the biggest impression.

Jackson is really remarkable here, and more vulnerable than we've ever seen him, bringing sensitivity and nuance to Ptolemy's dementia as he is haunted by a childhood spent in the Jim Crow South. But he is also allowed to bring his natural charisma to the table (there is at least one use of his favourite word "motherfucker") as Ptolemy, a natural Southern showman and raconteur, soon reverses his mental decline.

Marketing for the show suggested it might slot into the "miracle pill" subgenre of sci-fi (see also: *Lucy*, *Limitless*), but that side of things is handled fairly lightly. The show, like the book it's based on, is more interested in the relationship between Ptolemy and his niece's best friend's daughter Robyn (Dominique Fishback, as electric here as she was in *Judas and The Black Messiah*); and in the grander, existential questions of what a whole life can amount to. (It's also notable for being a prestige drama with — save for Walton Goggins' slick-haired doctor — a majority African-American cast, still the exception rather than the norm.)

Originally conceived as a film, the pacing is at times slow and considered, thick with dialogue-heavy scenes, and while that sometimes seems like the product of a too-faithful book-to-TV transfer (Mosley has adapted his own novel), Jackson keeps things compelling. If *Pulp Fiction* taught us anything, it's that nobody can monologue on a biblical register quite like him. "It's like I'm standing on the tallest mountain in the world," he holds forth at one point, "and laying down in my grave at the same time." It feels like the role of a lifetime for him, in every sense. **JOHN NUGENT**

**VERDICT** Handsomely mounted and thoughtfully paced, this is Samuel L. Jackson giving it his all with a complex, emotional, deeply personal role. In a decades-long career, he's rarely been better.

## ON SCREEN CHECKLIST

Your at-a-glance view of this month's reviews



### FILM

#### OUT NOW

THE ADAM PROJECT	★★★	PG-13
THE BATMAN (ARROW)	★★★★	PG-13
THE DESPERATE HOUR	★★	PG-13
DOD	★★★★	PG-13
NMI	★★★★★	PG-13
LUCY AND DESI	★★★★	PG-13
HARRY ME	★★★★	PG-13
STUDIO EGG	★★★★	PG-13
TURNING RED	★★★★★	PG-13
UNCHARTED	★★	PG-13

#### 18 MARCH

DEEP WATER	★★	PG-13
EUROPA	★★★★	PG-13
FRESH	★★★★★	PG-13
ONE OF THESE DAYS	★★	PG-13
THE PHANTOM OF THE OPEN RIVER	★★★★	PG-13

#### 24 MARCH

THE SPINE OF NIGHT	★★★★	PG-13
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#### 25 MARCH

THE WORST PERSON IN THE WORLD	★★★★★	PG-13
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#### 1 APRIL

THE NOVICE	★★★	PG-13
TRUE THINGS	★★★	PG-13

#### 8 APRIL

COMPARTMENT NO. 6	★★★★	PG-13
THE OUTFIT	★★★★	PG-13

### TV

#### OUT NOW

THE DROPOUT	★★★★	PG-13
THE LAST DAYS OF PTOLEMY GREY	★★★★★	PG-13
PYROMANIACS: SEASON 6	★★★★★	PG-13
PICARD: SEASON 2	★★★	PG-13

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# DARKER MAGIC



SAM RAIMI IS  
BACK, AND HE  
WANTS TO SCARE  
US TO DEATH  
AND SCRAMBLE  
OUR MINDS. WE  
SPEAK TO THE  
DIRECTOR, PLUS  
STAR BENEDICT  
CUMBERBATCH  
AND MORE, ABOUT  
THE SECRETS OF

**DOCTOR  
STRANGE  
IN THE  
MULTIVERSE  
OF MADNESS**

WORDS CHRIS HEWITT





# BENEDICT CUMBERBATCH HAS A BUCKET LIST.



Hard to believe that someone who's played Sherlock Holmes, Khan Noonien Singh, Frankenstein (and *The Monster*), plus a giant talking dragon, been nominated for two Oscars, and helped save half the universe would have anything left to tick off, but he does. Three things, in fact. "People say, 'Well, what do you want to do next?'" he tells *Esquire*. "Well, a Western, a horror and a musical. Those are the three things. I guess I've done a version of a Western, and now I've done a version of a horror."

The version of a Western is, of course, Jane Campion's *The Power Of The Dog*. The version of a horror, though, is perhaps a little harder to guess, given that it's the latest instalment in the world's most lucrative franchise; one perhaps better known for cloaks than daggers. But in case the luridly Lovecraftian title hadn't tipped you off, *Doctor Strange In The Multiverse Of Madness*, the 28th film in the Marvel Cinematic Universe and the latest to star Cumberbatch as the surgeon-turned-sorcerer, is trying something a little different.

It is a title, and a movie, that not only allows Cumberbatch to tick another one off the old bucket list, but which is full of intrigue. It promises to delve deep into the mysteries of the Multiverse, just months after *Spider-Man: No Way Home* properly introduced audiences to the concept. It heralds the return of a much-missed director who helped pave the way for the MCU in the first place. And yes, it's Marvel Studios' first horror flick, with zombies and jump scares and darkness aplenty. "I think it's going to be surprising for some people, tonally, about where the MCU goes," says the film's producer, and Marvel Studios sorcerer supreme, Kevin Feige. You won't believe your Eyes of Agamotto.

IT'S TAKEN ALMOST six years for Doctor Strange to get his first sequel. Not that the character has been sitting around with his magical thumb up his butt since Doctor Strange debuted to a decent critical and commercial reception in 2016. Instead, he has shown up in an impactful cameo in *Thor: Ragnarok*; was a major player in *Avengers: Infinity War*; helped beat Thanos with his uncanny command of portals in *Avengers: Endgame*; then inadvertently opened the Multiverse and unleashed a clutter of Spider-Men in *No Way Home*. All of which quietly





Clockwise from top: Benedict Cumberbatch reprises his role as Dr. Stephen Strange; Elizabeth Olsen as Wanda Maximoff/Scarlet Witch; Director Sam Raimi and crew (including a magical-cloak operator) on set.

established him as one of the MCU's MVPs, filling the 'goateed egomaniac' void left by Tony Stark's death. And while his cachet was going up in the foreground, in the background things were quietly motoring along.

Initially, Scott Derrickson — the director who had shepherded Strange to the big screen — signed on to helm the sequel in 2018. At the San Diego Comic-Con the following year, that wonderfully OTT title (a joint effort from Feige, who provided the 'Multiverse' and Derrickson, who came up with the 'Madness', according to co-producer Richie Palmer) was announced to great fanfare, along with the declaration that it would be the first MCU movie specifically designed, as Kris Kross once put it, to make you jump. Which made sense — Derrickson was a horror director at heart, and the first movie flirted with tropes of that genre. All seemed rosy in the Sanctum Sanctorum, until in January 2020 it was announced that Derrickson would no longer direct.

Creative differences were cited, and before you make the 'he was creative, they were different' gag, Feige is way ahead of you. "We love Scott and I think Scott feels the same," says Feige. "Nobody believes it, but it was just creative differences."

The assumption was that Derrickson wanted to make a no-holds-barred weird, gnarly, scary movie — say, *Hereditary* with a \$200 million budget — and that the Marvel machine wouldn't allow something so quirky and idiosyncratic.



to happen. "There's been some thought that that was the creative difference with Scott and Marvel, and it was not," says Feige. "Because we love that idea. The intention was that Strange would guide us into a much creepier side of the world."

Feige found himself scrambling to find a director at the 11th hour. A list of potential replacements was drawn up. Conspicuous by its absence from that list was one particular name. "Our executive producer, Eric Carroll, and Richie Palmer were calling around to see who was interested, and Sam's agent said, 'What about Sam Raimi?'" says Feige. "We thought, 'That would be incredible, but there's no chance of that.' But he wanted to come in and meet. And in the first meeting, it was amazing to reconnect with him, and see his enthusiasm to jump back into this world."

In retrospect, choosing Sam Raimi as director of *The Multiverse Of Madness* is the no-brainiest of no-brainers. If you're looking for a director who is the centre of a Venn diagram between superhero movie and horror movie, the creative genius who brought both *The Evil Dead* and *Spider-Man* to the big screen would be slap-bang in the middle. One of the most visually inventive directors around, his influence could already be glimpsed in some of the trippier sequences Derrickson staged in the original film. And, of course, Feige had already worked with him on the original run of *Spider-Man* movies (Tobey Maguire vintage), back when Feige was merely a promising chunk of cheddar, and not yet the big cheese. Their first meetings together brought some old memories flooding back. "He said, 'We might need four or five pre-viz and conceptual artists,'" recalls Feige. "I said, 'Sam, we've got dozens. They're all yours.' It took me back to the days where I was just watching on the Spidey movies, and him having to fight for that, while essentially defining and revolutionising what that kind of filmmaking was at the time."

Raimi was keen for a number of reasons. There was his childhood attachment to Strange who, like Spider-Man, was a Stan Lee-Steve Ditko creation. "I have always loved his comic, and the first movie was brilliantly done," says Raimi. Although he does admit that Strange isn't the only superhero for whom he'd have answered the call. "I've always loved Batman. If I ever saw the Batignal up in the air, I'd come running," he laughs, which must be music to Marvel's ears. "And if I heard that deep, gurgling laugh of The Shadow coming from the darkness, I would also tentatively step outside. And Spider-Man would be ahead of Doctor Strange, but I don't want to put him down the list!"

But there was also the simple fact that Raimi hadn't directed a movie in several years: his last, *On The Great And Powerful*, was in 2013. That Kubrickian fallow period wasn't by choice — he had been attached to a number of projects, including a *World Of Warcraft* movie that swallowed a year. "I had invested a lot of my heart and soul into the thing," he says. "I've had a lot of misadventures like that. I have missed



**Top to bottom:**  
Benedict Cumberbatch flies into action; Xochitl Gomez as MCU newbie America Chavez — with Masters Of The Mystic Arts Daniel Drumen (Mark Anthony Brighten) and Hamir (Topo Wresniwiro).





directing. It's really the only thing I know how to do. I couldn't be a stockbroker or a banker or a plumber, and I'm thrilled to be working with my old friend Kevin Feige."

Feige is aware that hiring Raimi brings with it certain expectations; expectations of the kind of crazy camera moves and misadventure montages you don't often get in mainstream movies; expectations Feige believes will be emphatically met. "We want it to be a Sam Raimi movie," he stresses. "We would give notes like, 'This action is cool — you're competing with

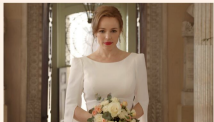
Avengers and Spider-Man, no problem — but don't forget the Sam Raimi parts.' You will see just how Sam Raimi it is, in ways that will make fans of *Evil Dead II* very happy." Groovy.

**I**F YOU CALL your film *The Multiverse of Madness*, you'd damn well better deliver on both the Multiverse and the madness. Rachel McAdams, who returns as Strange's great lost love, Christine Palmer, says, "I was certainly a part of things I never seen on screen," while Cumberbatch describes it as "quite a journey. It's going to be a trip through all the complexity and wonder and horror of the Multiverse."

Helping *Strange* move through it is a brand-new addition to the MCU: America Chavez (Xochitl Gomez), a young girl who has the power to switch between parallel universes. Finding herself chased by mysterious creatures intent on siphoning off her power and using it for their own nefarious ends, America arrives in our universe, pursued, as the trailers suggest, by a one-eyed, tentacled superbastard called Gargantos. Just in time for *Strange* to save her with the aid of his boss, Benedict Wong's Wong, who is actually the Sorcerer Supreme of the MCU. "I call it Phase Wong," laughs Wong of his run of recent appearances in Marvel movies, starting with *Shang-Chi And The Legend Of The Ten Rings*. "It's a nice, interesting shift. Wong has taken on a new role, and that dynamic changes between them both."

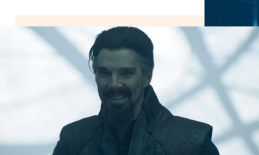
For *Strange*, who is still troubled by the dalliance he had with the Multiverse in *Spider-Man: No Way Home*, America leads him to investigate further. "He is very aware that he must not allow Multiversal episodes like we experienced in *No Way Home*," says Raimi, "because he saw how dangerous they were." Turning to the only other person whom he knows might have knowledge of this Multiverse malarkey, Wanda Maximoff (Elizabeth Olsen), *Strange* and America are then propelled through a vast array of different worlds. A *Strange* in a stranger land, he comes face-to-face with variants of Wanda, his old friend-turned-foe Karl Mordo (Chiwetel Ejiofor), Wong, his old flame Christine Palmer (Rachel McAdams), and even himself.

In fact, he comes face-to-face-to-face-to-face with at least three versions of himself: a corrupted, corroded version called Sinister *Strange*; a seemingly heroic variant based on the character's run in the comic-book supergroup, The Defenders; and a zombieified *Strange*, which is perhaps the most obvious link between Raimi's present and his gore-soaked past. There's likely to be at least one or two more, making it quite the challenge for Cumberbatch as his ur-*Strange* embarks on an existential odyssey littered with flesh-and-blood reminders of how his life might have turned out, for good and for ill. "There are some very bold ideas, and some extraordinary tests of *Strange* and encounters," says Cumberbatch. "There are some very unexpected conclusions. It's fascinating to explore what would happen



**Top to bottom:**

Benedict Wong returns as Sorcerer Supreme Wong; Rachel McAdams as Stephen Strange's former sweetheart Christine Palmer; Strange stands before the Illuminati.



if there was an alternate reality that you could visit and all the mess that might ensue."

The potential for madness of the psychological kind is evident. Visually, it also promises to be madder than a bag of magical snakes. Zombies notwithstanding, the trailer offers glimpses of a jungle realm populated by dinosaurs that may well be The Savage Land, home of Tarzan rip-off/loving homage Ka-Zar; an empire in which Ultron robots act as armed guards; and, strangest of all, a realm that appears to be animated. "There are infinite worlds out there," says Palmer. "Some are identical to ours, and we wouldn't be able to pick out the differences. Some are animated, and we are 2D cartoon characters with yellow skin like The Simpsons."

And this is just the tip of the iceberg. Raimi believes it's the job of directors "to describe the impossible; to use lighting, sound, camera motion, the performance of an actor to give the audience the seeds to build something terrible and fantastic in their mind. That's what this job demands."

Michael Waldron, who moved from his head writer role on *Loki* to reworking *The Multiverse Of Madness* with Raimi after Derrickson's departure, expands. "We tried not to be afraid of going to places that will make the audience go, 'Oh my God, I can't believe I just saw that,'" he says. "But they're not gonna care unless they're invested in the main character. And Strange is such a fascinating hero."

**F**ASCINATING IS ONE way to describe Stephen Strange. Here are a few more. Arrogant. Egotistical. Conceited. Bumptious. Prick. Admittedly, his rougher edges have been somewhat sanded off since his first appearance in the MCU, but he's still prone to reckless decisions.

In *Doctor Strange, Mordo*, enraged by that recklessness when Strange breaks the rules governing time itself, quits the magic order

**Clockwise from top left:** ; Dr. Evil Strange; Strange and Chavez plan their next move; Carving open a portal to another dimension; Gargantos — not a fan of public transport.



and tells Strange that one day, "The bill comes due." In *The Multiverse Of Madness*, that bill is coming. And there's an almighty service charge attached. At least 15 per cent. "There's a lot of reckoning," adds Cumberbatch. "And a lot of discovery. Strange is almost a stranger to himself before this film unfolds and reveals what, essentially, is in his nature, that he then has to either confront or resist or fall into or become."

Part of that will see Strange tested through the prism of his relationships with the film's key female characters. Having come off one testy relationship with a teenager in *No Way Home*, the potential for a repeat with America Chavez looms large. Raimi is keen to defuse fears. "Strange is still learning about the Multiverse," he says. "And here's a character that can actually travel through it. He's such a know-it-all all the time, and to have to learn from a kid probably smarter." Then there's Christine, Strange's former

love. One of the trenchant criticisms of *Doctor Strange* was that the great Rachel McAdams was given particularly short shrift, with little to do. That is addressed here — in our world, Christine is about to get married while Strange is still moping around, melancholically, in his chamber of secrets. But in another world, Strange meets a very different, and much more involved, Christine. "I wasn't just wearing scrubs this time around," laughs McAdams. "I was certainly a part of things I've never seen on screen."

And then there's Wanda. Last seen finally embracing her prodigious powers and Scarlet Witch identity at the end of *WandaVision*, the show which essentially chronicled her nervous breakdown following the death of her beloved Vision, Wanda has encased herself at her very own Portress Of Solitude, while she researches the Darkhold, a book filled with dark magic. "Madness has many different definitions,"



says Palmer. "It's maddening for Doctor Strange to have to watch the love of his life marry someone else. And it's maddening for Wanda to have been told, 'There's a book, and there's a chapter about you in that book you should read, and secrets you don't know about yourself.'"

Bar the shot of the mourners at Tony Stark's funeral in *Avengers: Endgame*, Strange and Wanda had never shared a scene together. That changes here. "I really was excited to do dialogue with him," says Olsen. "I really enjoyed our constant conversation, of analysis and trying to understand where both characters are coming from." Where that relationship ends up is anyone's guess, but a Wanda who can fully give into her combustible Scarlet Witch persona would be a serious challenge for Strange, or even a whole Cumberbatch of Stranges, to take down. "I don't know who's more powerful than Wanda," says Palmer. "Meeting the Wanda Maximoff at the end of *Endgame* would have been a lot for Strange. Who comes out on top as the most powerful being in the universe? Maybe we find out at the end of the movie."

As with any MCU movie, it feels like much is being left unsaid and unshown. Rumour is a rife with *The Multiverse Of Madness* as it was with *No Way Home*, and the persistent assumption — frequently denied, and always with a straight face by those who worked on the movie — that Andrew Garfield and Tobey Maguire would show up. (By the way, Raimi loved *No Way Home*. "I was honoured," he says. "It's like someone said, 'You know your old friends that have passed away? We've found

a way to bring them back for a brief time.")

"There's a lot going on in it," teases Cumberbatch. That could include, well, anything, from the return of Tom Hiddleston's Loki to a cameo from Raimi's old pal, Bruce Campbell. There might even be a fish called Wanda. The recent trailer raises plenty of questions. At one point, we see Strange being led before a tribunal to be judged for his Multiversal transgressions. That tribunal is believed to be the Illuminati, a group of heroes who, in the comic books, include X-Men founder Professor Charles Xavier. Fantastic Four leader Reed Richards, and Tony Stark. Scuttlebutt on the street is that the Illuminati in this film may well include Mordo ("We're in contentious dynamics, is the simplest way of putting it," says Ejiofor of this Mordo's relationship with Strange), introduce John Krasinski as Richards, and cram in a cameo from, of all people, Tom Cruise as an alt-Tony Stark (if so, it's the deepest of cuts; Cruise was once attached to the role long before Robert Downey Jr. grew a goatee in earnest).

Richie Palmer laughs, searching carefully for what he can say. "As you saw in *Spider-Man: No Way Home*, some rumours ended up being true, some did not," he says. "I would love to see Tony again, but some rumours are just rumours. I will say that I love the Illuminati. But if we ever introduce the Illuminati in the future, it might be more MCU-driven and have some more ties to our characters in the MCU, versus just replicating what's in the comics."

There is one cameo that would seem to be pretty clear-cut: in the trailer, one of the members of what may or may not be the Illuminati speaks to Strange. And that voice is, unmistakably, Patrick Stewart's, leading many to speculate that we're about to see a Xavier variant, and that this may be the way (finally) of introducing mutants into the MCU. "I'll quote the first *X-Men* movie and say, 'Are you sure you saw what you saw?'" laughs Palmer. "There are infinite versions of these characters, and just because you may have heard something familiar doesn't mean it's someone you have seen before." Stewart has since confirmed that it is him in the trailer, so perhaps this is an alternate Xavier. Familiar, but unfamiliar.

There's a danger, of course, that all of this could collapse under its own weight. *No Way Home*, however, showed that legacy casting can provide more than mere fan service. "It's a big, big movie," says Cumberbatch of *The Multiverse Of Madness*. "It's going to be an absolute riot. And if it brings off the level of ambition it's got, we're going to have a success on the level of *Spidey*. There you go, I'll put my flag in the sand."

If he's right, then it could shape the very future of the MCU. And it might just lead to Cumberbatch crossing off the final item from that bucket list. Never mind the first MCU horror; could the first Marvel musical be around the corner? Stranger things have happened. ●

COVER: JACQUES TOFFI/RETNA; STRANGE: MARCO VENTURA/RETNA; WANDA: JACQUES TOFFI/RETNA; CLARK: JACQUES TOFFI/RETNA; KERMIT: JACQUES TOFFI/RETNA

## SEEING DOUBLE

AS DOCTOR STRANGE COMES FACE-TO-FACE WITH HIS BAD SELF, WE REVISIT MORE EVIL DOPPELGÄNGERS



ASH AND EVIL ASH  
ARMY OF DARKNESS

Having screwed up with the Necronomicon once again, hapless Deadite-slayer Ash is plagued by a crazed, cackling version of himself. Cue Bruce Campbell relentlessly beating himself up.



MICHAEL AND GARTHE KNIGHT  
KNIGHT RIDER

An infamous *Knight Rider* episode featured a criminal version of Michael Knight which was, well, David Hasselhoff with a moustache. This guy was called Garthe. Yes, with an 'e'.



ADELAIDE AND RED  
US

In Jordan Peele's *Us*, the Wilsons meet an entire family of doppelgängers, emerging to take over the world. Lupita Nyong'o is superb as matriarch Adelaide and terrifying clone Red.



CLARK KENT AND EVIL SUPERMAN  
SUPERMAN III

In the midst of a mystic mental breakdown, an unruly Superman splits in two, the good-hearted Clark Kent wailing out of him. The pair go at it until Clark strangles bad Supes to oblivion.



KERMIT AND CONSTANTINE  
MUPPETS MOST WANTED

Kermit's criminal lookalike Constantine, distinguishable by a mole, slaps a fake mole on Kermit, resulting in our hero being dispatched to a Siberian Gulag. Absolute insanity. ALEX GODFREY

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# EMPIRE

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# 400

➡ THINGS WE'VE ➡  
**LEARNED**

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WE'RE HERE! 400 ISSUES! STRADDLING FIVE DECADES OF FILMMAKING, WE'VE COVERED IT ALL — INCLUDING THOSE FEW YEARS WHEN FOR SOME REASON EVERYTHING WAS IN 3D. HERE'S THE KNOWLEDGE WE'VE PICKED UP ALONG THE WAY, FOR BETTER OR WORSE...

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**WORDS: TEAM EMPIRE PAST AND PRESENT**

*WITH SPECIAL THANKS TO:*

DEBI BERRY, MARK DINNING, COLIN KENNEDY,  
IAN NATHAN, OLLY RICHARDS AND EMMA SPACEY



## YOU CAN LAUNCH A FILM MAGAZINE WITH THIS COVER... AND SURVIVE

"The movie is always bigger than the star. That was one of the golden house rules laid down for the launch of *Empire*, and the only defence I can offer to today's jury for the otherwise inexplicable decision to put Dennis Quaid on the cover. The *Jerry Lee* biopic, *Great Balls of Fire*, was actually doomed to be a Big Deal back then, even if time has been less kind to the film. Our mission statement, though we would never have called it that at the time, was, "At last the movies got the magazine they deserve." I like to think it was a promise we lived up to in those halcyon days of 1989, and a promise that holds true to this day." **BARRY MCILHENY, EDITOR 1989-92**

# INTERVIEWS MIGHT NOT GO TO PLAN



- If you interview Jason Biggs and Alyson Hannigan about *American Pie* and the fire alarm goes off and the building gets evacuated, they'll continue the interview on the fire escape.
- If John Travolta is jet-lagged, he'll kindly ask permission to walk around you in circles while you chat.
- Michael Bay does not like an overuse of orange lighting with his *Transformers* CGI work—and, during a video conference, will berate those responsible for it in front of you. "Someone is really in love with orange."
- If you work for *Empire* you might be fortunate enough to get asked to interview



### ► KEVIN COSTNER WILL TALK TO YOU BY A ROASTING-HOT FIRE. YOU MIGHT MELT.

"At Kevin Costner's house to talk his ace Western *Open Range*, he sat me down next to a roaring fire. After a few minutes, I started boiling, completely parched, and reached for the water Costner had helpfully put by my chair. Just as my hand reached it, Costner's dog slobbered all over the plastic bottle, covering it with pooch saliva. I spent the rest of the 90-minute interview melting." **IAN FREER**

## TOTALLY RANDOM

Jean-Claude Van Damme's chosen greeting before interviews on his boat in Cannes in the 1990s was to somersault along its top deck in white-linen

trousers and an open shirt, and come to a stop with his bare foot underneath your chin. Then lower it really slowly.

► Mickey Rourke isn't a fan of

patterned scarves and is more than happy to inform patterned-scarf fan Darren Aronofsky of this.

► Interviewing a chain-smoking

Takashi Miike on a rowdy beach in Cannes while an interpreter translates and drunk people blow vuvuzelas around you is bewildering.

► If Arnold Schwarzenegger lays into Donald Trump and his *Apprentice* ratings during an *Empire* interview, a very public

Twitter spat between the two will take place.

► Michael Mann cannot mend tape records.

► At the end of a phone interview,

Frances McDormand might say, "Let's both go and have a good day now."

► Sigourney Weaver has the baby queen from *Alien 3* "in



an animatronic cat called Kitty Galore.

Or you might get asked to talk to a computer-generated guinea pig.

If you interview Kermit The Frog during a press roundtable, you may have to sit there in bewilderment while another journalist asks him a hard-hitting industry question about Disney's acquisition of The Muppets.

During a long day of press in a hotel suite, Bruce Willis might inexplicably change into a bathrobe at 3pm for your on-camera interview.

After interviewing John Malkovich, you might be handed a John Malkovich Party Pack including a mask of his face. And a *Dangerous Liaisons* DVD.

In a staring contest with Miss Piggy, you won't win.

Promoting *No Country For Old Men*, Joel Coen would lie on the hotel sofa, while Ethan Coen would conduct his responses from the bathroom while switching the light on and off.

Oliver Stone is a big hugger. Especially if you accidentally meet him in the lift after an interview.

At the end of an interview, Paul Feig might pour whiskies for you both and toast the Queen.



## BILL MURRAY IS UNPREDICTABLE



If you interview Bill Murray while he's lying on a slowly deflating inflatable crocodile in a paddling pool, he'll ask the journalists to get in and dunk the most annoying one. Not you, but your phone will get ruined.

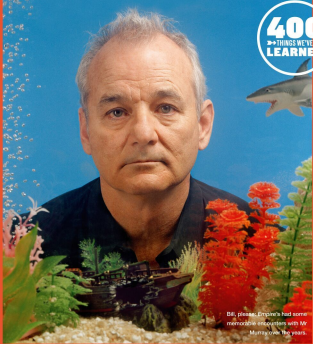
Bill Murray can't remember his earliest memory.

If Bill Murray spots Bobby Brown, he'll twirl an imaginary microphone cord and sing 'My Prerogative' to him.

Even if you're not on Bill Murray's interview schedule in Cannes, he might summon you anyway, break out a plate of cookies, and discuss poetry.

You can interview Bill Murray on Zoom while he's ordering cocktails on a golf course.

If you interview Bill Murray shortly before you're about to have a child, he'll give you sincere parenting tips and be genuinely delighted for you.



Bill, please, *Empire*'s had some memorable encounters with Mr. Murray over the years.

## IF YOU COME UP WITH RIDICULOUS MAGAZINE IDEAS, YOU MIGHT USE THEM ANYWAY

Count Dooku Sudoku

Mr Biehn's Holiday

Judge Not Lest Ye Be Judged By Judge Reinhold

Listen To Your Friend Billy Zane

Chris Packham On The Animals Of Avatar

Jude Laws Of Attraction



a drawer somewhere".

If he visits the Empire office, Dan Aykroyd will shake hands with everybody exiting the lift, Empire staffers or not.

James Cameron might sign off from an interview with, "We only have so many heartbeats. Use them well."

Sylvester Stallone will happily show you his scars. Where his throat was operated on. Where he had his neck fused. Where

he had a cadaver bone put in his neck. Where his whole calf was lifted up.

In the reception area of Robert

Rodriguez's Troublemaker Studios in Texas, you will find a wooden confessional booth, shipped over from a Mexican church.

Ray Winstone is so scared of lions, when he sees them at the zoo he thinks they're plotting against him.

As a child, Sam Mendes dreamt that the Wicked Witch Of The West was blowing out street lamps one by one.



400  
THINGS WE'VE  
LEARNED

# FILM SETS WILL SURPRISE YOU

- Shockingly (not shockingly), the Iron Throne is really rather uncomfortable.
- Christopher Nolan never sits down on set.
- Big, expensive explosions don't always go to plan. When they blew up the mountain fortress in *Inception*, it fell the wrong way.
- If you try on Michael Fassbender's Frank Sidebottom head, it might get stuck (it did).
- When he's not filming, Jim Broadbent does the crossword. He's half-man, half-crossword.
- Roads in films always look so lush and shiny because teams with hoses leap out between takes, furiously spraying them, even in summer.
- You can fly 4,700 miles to Vancouver to watch a wedding scene with no dialogue, then get flown back again.
- If Jason Fletmyng pays a visit to a Guy Ritchie set and hasn't seen him in a while, he might treat him to a massage in the director's chair.
- When you're on set of *Shining* sequel *Dream Scape* and the woman from Room 237 walks past and smiles, it can be... discombobulating.
- Being on a precise replica set of the Overlook Hotel in general is about as trippy as it gets. It's difficult to stand beside that typewriter and not feel blissfully weirded out.
- Watching Rik Mayall dance around a corridor in a melted-red-rubber bikini was a joy.
- The set of an *X-Files* movie is as inventive as you'd imagine. Especially when children in pyjamas are replaced by little people in pyjamas, so that the production can keep shooting through the night.
- If you're invited to visit the set of *Entourage*, it will be on a day when they're filming Turtle parking his car.
- Peter Jackson sometimes drives to set in Chitty Chitty Bang Bang.
- On set, Peter Weller might, unprompted, give you an hour-long lecture on classical civilisations. And you will like it.



➔ **KEN LOACH IS THE REAL DEAL.** "I went on location with Ken Loach's *I, Daniel Blake*, and saw Hayley Squires shoot the shoplifting sequence. A one-minute scene and near enough two billion takes. Loach kept the Costcutter open all day, stopping mid-take whenever a local wandered in to buy something. If you've wondered why his films feel like real life, it's because, well, it's real life." SIMON CROOK



**GARY BUSSEY**  
FACTS!

Gary Bussey will give you a nickname (Buttplug) and then only refer to you as that for the rest of the day.

If you accidentally drop Gary Bussey's surfboard from *Big Wednesday*, he will scream

in your face, then go home and nap.

Gary Bussey has a cardboard box in his garage, labelled 'Gary's Childhood'.

Handing over a megaphone to Gary Bussey is a bad idea.

## TOTALLY RANDOM

Richard Harris wrote his Empire Awards speech on a napkin, having arrived from the pub with five minutes to spare. He then brought the house down.

If you need *Three Amigos* sombreros for Chevy Chase, Steve Martin and Martin Short, the latter's cousin, an Amigos impersonator, will Fed-Ex them to you.

The poster that has pride of place outside Robert De Niro's office is for the 1992 comedy *Mistress*, in which he plays a ruthless businessman.

Martin Scorsese owns a copy of Scorsese On Scorsese.

If you interview Oliver Stone, it's best not to bring up *Natural Born Killers*. Seriously, don't do it.

Charles and Diana requested a print of Phil Collins' *Buster* to watch at Buckingham Palace.

Prince Edward went incognito to London's Cannon Haymarket to watch *The Princess Bride*.

Extras were paid £20 to have their heads shaved for *Full Metal Jacket*.

As an extra, if you played three different characters in one scene in *Inspector Morse*, you were paid for only one character, and weren't delighted about it.

Jodie Foster celebrated winning an Oscar for *The Accused* by having Champagne and caviar on toast in her tracksuit.

Go-karting with the directors of *Crank* is not for the faint-hearted.

Showgirls' writer Joe Eszterhas wasn't aware there was a *Showgirls 2: Penny's From Heaven* until we told him about it.

Steven Seagal does not like the lighting in the 2006 remake of *The Hills Have Eyes*.

If you have to run to the corner shop to buy Dictaphone batteries before interviewing Mary Streep, she'll wait patiently and make you tea.

Nicolas Cage once drove through a haunted forest in Romania. A man there asked him if he'd seen the floating people with no legs.

Nicolas Cage turned on the Christmas lights in Bath.

Daniel Craig once retrieved the missing hearing aid of Sir Peregrine Worthington from a dustbin.

Steven Spielberg has been asked on the street if he's the man who directed *Sharknado*.

Will Smith can solve a Rubik's Cube in 55 seconds.

Playing Phil Collins music at a photoshoot celebrating American Psycho will not impress Christian Bale.

Chuck Norris is a fan of The Prodigy's 'Firestarter'.

The most important person on a set is the focus puller (according to Guillermo del Toro).

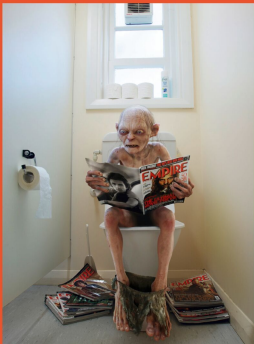
Tom Hiddleston explaining *The Crystal Maze* to Brie Larson is an enjoyable thing to witness.

If you inform Gillian Anderson about an *X-Files* fan theory, she'll have a T-shirt printed about it and wear it to fan conventions.



ALAMY, GETTY IMAGES, SHUTTERSTOCK, WETA, WOLFE TROT FIVE

# ➡ GOLLUM READS EMPIRE ON THE TOILET (AND OTHER LORD OF THE RINGS REVELATIONS)



➡ John Rhys-Davies still uses the same phone he had during the *Rings* shoot. It is a Nokia 6310i.

➡ The first *Empire* cover to feature *The Lord Of The Rings* was hand-delivered to the dark tower of Cirith Ungol.

➡ While dressed in full Saruman garb, Christopher Lee once mistook *Empire* for studio catering, but decided against the chill. "I'm due on set this afternoon," he growled, patting his stomach with a taloned hand.

➡ Christopher Lee called the *Empire* office to demand that his death scene be put back into *The Return Of The King*. "Where is Saruman?", he



Gollum works his way through the *Lord Of The Rings* issues of his favourite magazine, in a glorious image created for us by Weta Digital.

inquired. As kindly as possible, we suggested he should call Peter Jackson.

➡ To help make a point, Viggo Mortensen will sometimes send you a photograph of a tree.

➡ Nicolas Cage is a big fan of *The Lord Of The Rings* and believes "the moment where Gollum goes into the river of fire and becomes an unlikely hero is the most profound".

➡ Joel Silver's favourite scene is the one "where those severed heads are being thrown over the wall".



## CELEBS LOVE A PHOTOBOOTH

ESPECIALLY DURING RAMBUNCTIOUS  
NIGHTS AT THE EMPIRE AWARDS



# ANIMALS ARE POWERFUL



● If you interview Christopher Walken in Morocco, he may well explain how to shave an elephant.

● Jean-Claude Van Damme sniffs the air like a dog at night because he's from the streets.

● Dolph Lundgren is quite happy to cuddle ginger kittens in the *Empire* office if he happens upon promotional activity for *Puss In Boots*.

● Brian Blessed might be delayed for an interview if a Shetland pony gets into

his kitchen and defecates all over the place.

● If you interview Anthony Hopkins on set of *The Wolfman*, he'll talk to you for an hour in full werewolf costume.

● Paul W.S. Anderson brings his dog on set with him. Every day, it is a giant Schnauzer called Cromwell. He (the dog) just wanders around, off the leash, sniffing everyone.

● Grace Jones is scared of moths. More specifically, "a moth." You can ask anybody who knows her.



● If you allow goats into your office to promote *The Men Who Stare At Goats*, they will eat the carpet. Resulting in animals being banned from the building.

● For *Indiana Jones And The Last Crusade*, 8,000 rats were individually washed.

● Before filming that rats sequence, Steven Spielberg asked the trainer to bring 100 of them to set, then asked him to prove that they could swim as, "I don't want one drowned rat."

● The cockroaches for *Indiana Jones And The Temple Of Doom* were sourced from the rubbish tips of Delhi.

● Sean Connery really hated spiders.

● It is unwise to ask David Attenborough if he once stood on an antaeater.

● On Jean-Jacques Annaud's *The Bear*, Bart The Bear's daily diet included 15 chickens, two salmon and "all the marshmallows he could stomach".

● Michael Bay had a dog called Bonerusher.

● Carey Mulligan has a dog named Rambo. She's never seen *Rambo*. She just thinks it's a funny name.

● When Patrick Swayze was tired, he'd exclaim, "I'm a fried puppy!"

● When he was a kid, Joel Edgerton's brother convinced him to put his finger inside a dead fish's mouth, in Fiji.



Top to bottom: Get your jaws around this — it's Liam Neeson's most-watched film; Rat trap: Indy and Elsa encounter 8,000 surprisingly squeaky-clean rodents.

● Robin Williams did a superb impression of a stressed-out ferret.

● Sam Neill has a rooster named Michael Fassbender. And a cow named Helena Bonham Carter.

● As a child, Jennifer Hudson used to talk to ants. They were her best friends.

● As a child, Evangeline Lilly used to eat ants. They taste of lemon.



Right: Grace Jones, not a fan of moths. Well, not that one, anyway.



## ►► SAM NEILL LOVES HIS PIG

"My favourite animal... I have quite a few. I've got ducks and goats and sheep and cattle and dogs. There's quite a few floating around the farm. But my favourite is my hideous, obscene Kuekue pig. We've been friends for over 12 years now. He loves me because I feed him and I scratch his back.

It's all one can ask for or be asked of in a relationship — feed me and scratch my back. He's called Angelica. He was called that by a little girl. It had been her pet. And despite the fact that he's clearly a bloke — I'm embarrassed to look at his balls, which are enormous — she called him Angelica and that stuck. I don't think he minds."

## TOTALLY RANDOM

Steve Martin doesn't think *The Man With Two Brains* is very funny, and will quarrel with you if you think it is.

►► Brie Larson likes to put on

activities for cast and crew on weekends, which she calls "The Briekend".

►► Watching 46 hours of Bond movies without sleep, on a diet

of fried chicken and coffee, is a terrible idea. You will consider using the headline "Diarrhea Another Day" (but opt for "For Sore Eyes Only").

►► Asking Ryan Reynolds and Jason Bateman to do an interview where they pretend to be each other is confusing for all involved.

►► Danny DeVito calls his right foot "Innolfoot" and will hoist it on a table at a moment's notice.

►► The Rock has been

known to use a spray-on perspiration called Sweet Sweat while shooting action movies.

►► One of Nicolas Cage's favourite

lines from his films is, "Vive la fucking France, man!", from *Deadfall*.

►► Getting trapped in Burt Reynolds' garden is less fun than it sounds.

**WHEN YOU ASK CELEBRITIES HOW HAIRY THEIR BACKSIDES ARE ON A SCALE OF ONE TO TEN, THEY WILL TELL YOU.**

**MATTHEW MCCONAUGHEY**

"Oh, zero. No hair on my back, no hair on my butt."

**PATRICK WILSON**

"Zero. And that's by genetics, not by razor. By the way, there's about five movies to prove that!"

**JAMIE BELL**

"One or two. I'm not a particularly hairy person. I'm pretty prepubescent really. Not that there's anything wrong with a hairy arse, of course. Every arse is beautiful."

**DANNY MCBRIDE**

"It's a four or a five, like a woman's ass."

**PAUL RUDD**

"I'd say a five. However, talk to me in a few years. As I get older, if I sit and concentrate, I can feel the hair growing."

**GERARD BUTLER**

"I'm going to play safe here and go for a five. Right down the middle. Right down the crack."

**KUMAIL NANJIANI**

"Five. I'm not a hairy person. But that area is definitely an over-achiever in that regard."

**ANDY SERKIS**

"Six. Hairier than Gollum's; less hairy than King Kong's."

**TRACY MORGAN**

"I'm Grizzly Adams, man. A nine!"

**CHRISTOPHER MINTZ-PLASSE**

"I'd give it a ten. I'm messy down there."



# IT'S FUN BEING EMPIRE'S VIDEO DUNGEON MASTER

• The meaning of "Starring Bruce Willis" has shifted from promise to threat in the last few years. But with "Starring Nicolas Cage," you've still got one in four odds of something extraordinary.

• No power of heaven or hell can end the metastasizing of the *Amityville* franchise. Similarly, there's no end to shark-attack movies... exorcism films... zombie apocalypses... or *Die Hard*-in-A... variants.

• Films with wacky outtakes under the end credits seldom get nominated in the Academy Award for Best Picture category.

• Whatever movie trend you complained about at the time will eventually provoke nostalgia.

• Whichever superheroes are on the *Empire* cover in the next six months, *Danny Trejo* could beat them all up before breakfast.

• Comedies with titles like *30 Nights Of Paranormal Activity With The Devil Inside The Girl With The Dragon Tattoo* or *The 41-Year-Old Virgin Who Knocked Up Sarah Marshall And Felt Superbad About It* are well worth leaving on the shelf.

• Influencers/vloggers/YouTube/TikTokkers/podcasters and the like are now Most Likely to be Killed Horribly... supplanting sking-sipping weed-smokers in '80s slasher films or curse-defying tomb-defilers in classic mummy movies.

• Never write off the Western. Every year, more cowboy movies get made than superhero films. Westerns may not dominate cinemas, but are a consistent (and fast) draw.

• Every Christmas you'll have to switch off "motion smoothing" on your parents' TV. **KIM NEWMAN**

- Robert Rodriguez had a cat named Sin Kitty.
- Milla Jovovich has never killed a wasp.
- Sylvester Stallone can never remember the words to "Eye Of The Tiger." "Rising up"... that's it"
- David Duchovny does a startlingly good impression of a goat bleating.
- If your dog defecated human vomit, no-one would have a dog. That's what Jamie Bell says.
- Minnie Driver chatted to a stranger's dog and didn't realise it belonged to Joni Mitchell until she looked up. She wanted to tell Mitchell how much she meant to her, but instead recommended dog-worming treatment.
- Liam Neeson has watched *Jaws* more than any other film, "even though I know the shark's fucking rubber".
- It's easier to work with Huskies than Dobermans, according to Charles Dance.
- Nicolas Cage holds snakes to relax.
- When Arnold Schwarzenegger was on medication to stop smoking so many cigars, he had wild dreams. "There were killings involved and there were lions."
- Quentin Tarantino isn't keen on being photographed with doves. Or chickens. Especially chickens.
- David Lynch talks to the birds that come to visit him. He feeds them pumpkin seeds.

Vector: Tiff Fox; Neil Edwards; Mary; Getty Images

So is getting stuck in the bathroom of Will Smith's hotel room.

The article is "essentially just a conveyor for getting the aios

into your mouth", Cameron Diaz informed us.

In the entrance to Arnold Schwarzenegger's house is a giant, semi-naked picture of him,

painted by LeRoy Neiman.

In the lobby of Arnold Schwarzenegger's Santa Monica office is a giant, black-and-white mural of the stars

of Hollywood's Golden age, including Humphrey Bogart, Lauren Bacall, Marilyn Monroe, Charlie Chaplin and Audrey Hepburn. In the middle of it all, a

full-colour Arnold as the Terminator crashes through the wall with a grenade-launcher. Shirley Temple looks on aghast.

Jeff Goldblum believes that Taika

Waititi is "kind of a Reuben sandwich without a top - he's got corned beef and sauerkraut and he's hot and spicy."

John Woo used to be a big fan of Cliff Richard. He loves his smile.



400  
THINGS WE'VE  
LEARNED



## HUGH JACKMAN'S WOLVERINE DIET PLAN IS HARDCORE

FISH

STEAMED SPINACH

AVOCADOS

CHICKEN

STEAK

CHICKEN

CHICKEN

EGGS

BROCCOLI

BROWN RICE

CHICKEN

CHICKEN

SWEET POTATO

# EVERYBODY'S

● If you fly to Hawaii to meet The Rock, he will give you a bottle of tequila.

● Matthew McConaughey drinks cocktails and wears a headlamp while he clips his fingernails. The process lasts 45 minutes.

● Ray Winstone likes toffees.

● When jetlagged, Eric Larson contemplates whether it would be pleasant to drown in jelly.

● Robert Rodriguez uses whole-milk mozzarella to make his pizzas, but the cheese shouldn't be fresh "because the high water content makes the pizza soggy and runny".

● David Lynch drinks coffee out of a bowl.

● You'll put on weight by picking at food, warns Guy Ritchie. "I've got to be strict with myself, otherwise I'll stick on two stone. It's when you're fiddling around,

picking. Watch out for picking."

● Interviewing Joaquin Phoenix by a swimming pool while he eats an orange very, very slowly is disconcerting.

● Viggo Mortensen might present you with a bar of bacon-flavoured chocolate.

● One of Mike Leigh's questions for his casts is, "Has your character ever eaten a Mr Kipling cake?"

● Kyle MacLachlan actually hates cherry pie. The stuff he eats in *Twin Peaks* is berry pie instead.

● Sean Astin regularly enjoys Subway sandwiches on honey white bread.

● Edgar Wright has a cocktail named after him: the "Edgar Wrightini". It involves two shots of tequila and a single espresso.



## HOLLYWOOD LOVES A SANDWICH

### NICOLAS CAGE

"The roast lamb sandwich with white bread and a bit of mayonnaise and arugula, thinly sliced."

### GARY OLDMAN

"I like a cheese and pickle. Nice cheese and pickle on a real old-fashioned bread. Ploughman's lunch."

### DOLPH LUNDGREN

"I suppose it would be tuna salad with lettuce, tomato, cheese and some mustard on wheat bread, with a dash of Tabasco. Boring as hell."

### EDGAR WRIGHT

"I like a cheese and jam sandwich. Controversial!"

### ETHAN COEN

"Prosciutto and mozzarella, a little arugula, oil and vinegar on it. Are you offering?"

### NICOLAS WINDING REFN

"Ham and cheese."

### PADDY CONSIDINE

"I like coronation chicken, brown bread."

### BRADLEY COOPER

"BLT. But then, I make everything into a sandwich."

### DAVID SCHWIMMER

"A medium-rare cheeseburger with mustard, tomato, lettuce and onion. I don't know if that qualifies as a sandwich; if not, turkey and Swiss."

# HUNGRY

Below: David Lynch likes to 'go Continental' with his coffee. Bottom left: Eric Larson, who has questions relating to jelly.

● Steven Spielberg's favourite Italian restaurant is Giorgio Baldi in Los Angeles. He orders the branzino.

● Anthony Hopkins is more than happy to share his gravy recipe.

● Movie vomit is made of prune chunks, fruit juice, Fruit Roll-Ups and mushrooms.

● If you turn up to an interview suffering with horrible jet-lag, Heather Graham will make you a cup of tea and fetch you a shortbread biscuit.

● Michael Caine once created his own brand of honey after befriending some bees. In 2016, a horde of them made a nest in a tree in his garden and a beekeeping neighbour then put them in a hive, where in time they produced a product called 'Caine's Honey'. "The bees become your friends," Caine told us. "The wasps never do."

● The worst thing Matthew McConaughey's ever eaten was a pickled pig's foot that he bought in a gas station. It was in a big jar of vinegar.

● Anya Taylor-Joy has a hatred of raisins bordering on a phobia. They terrify her.

● Andrew Garfield does a good homemade mayonnaise. "You have to use a whole fucking bunch" of grapeseed oil.

● In autumn 1997, Tommy Lee Jones ate salmon from a recipe that was 500 or 600 years old.

● Keanu Reeves was considering doing *Speed 2* to make it easier to get a table in Los Angeles restaurants.

● Jean-Claude Van Damme's hangover cure is a McDonald's Egg McMuffin and a beer.

● The last meal Tim Roth would choose on *Death Row* would be a steak and egg sandwich.



## JAMIE BELL

"BLT is taking the biscuit, but I also like egg salad."

## TOM HIDDLESTON

"I quite like there to be avocado involved in some capacity, and wholegrain mustard, and chicken."

## CHANNING TATUM

"Grilled cheese. And the bacon sandwich — this is something I've learned from Britain, the bacon sandwich. We do not have them in America and they are unbelievably awesome. Incredibly bad for you, but awesome."



Right: Keanu Reeves: pretty cool with most combinations of bread and filling.

## DANNY MCBRIDE

"A bacon butty smothered in brown sauce."

## JOE CORNISH

"I like some paperclips, a bit of tyre and sand on granary."

## KEANU REEVES

"A toasted baguette with peanut butter and apricot jam with really cold white wine. A Philadelphia steak sandwich is really good. Oh, and a good Italian sausage sandwich. But then, you can't beat toasted Swiss and tomato with a little mustard on. Ooooooh, or Black Forest ham with German black bread. Oh my God, and coleslaw and Swiss cheese with Russian dressing."

# TOTALLY RANDOM

Michael Caine is obsessed with Google. He learned about it from Quincy Jones.

If you interview Jack Nicholson in his house, you will find weighty historical works right alongside *The Big Book Of Breasts*.

Stanley Kubrick did not love Jack Nicholson calling him 'Stan the man'.

Tom Hanks will write a 2,000-word feature for *Empire* while recovering from Covid. On deadline, and perfectly.

Anthony Hopkins enjoys it when you do an impression of him, to his face. Even if it's not very good.

If he wasn't happy with the *Empire* crossword, Christopher Lee would telephone the office to complain about it.

Raptor drool, as we discovered on set of *Jurassic World: Fallen Kingdom*, is a mix of egg whites with massage oil.

Peter Jackson owns the costumes from *Blackadder Goes Forth*.

Rupert Grint used to change the language on Robbie Coltrane's phone between takes and would 'forget' to help him change it back.

Anthony Hopkins does a great Tommy Cooper impression.

Industrial Light & Magic's HQ includes a carbon-frozen Jar Jar Binks poking his tongue out.

Skywalker Ranch has its own fire station. One year the most action they had was rescuing a cat from a tree on the banks of Lake Ewok.



Never recreate *Cast Away* on a traffic island in Brighton.

Ben Mendelsohn swears as if he invented swearing. He's the best swearer.

Dick Van Dyke enjoys dabbling in CGI as a hobby and always buys the latest software.

Jared Harris' nickname on any given set is Kenny. Because he ends up dead in almost every film.

Robert Downey Jr. didn't go to Bono's birthday party one year because it coincided with his favourite TV show at the time, *Banged Up Abroad*.



Billy Bob Thornton's first serious crush was Felicity Kendal in *The Good Life*. She used to drive him "wild" as a young man.

A major studio once lost Ashley Judd on the London Underground for three hours.

Quentin Tarantino doesn't like visual effects. "I'd rather stick my dick in my Nintendo," he informed us.

Dustin Hoffman is a big fan of Johnny Vegas.

Oscars break if you drop them.

Arnold Schwarzenegger likes "the spice of danger".

Michael Aspel's favourite film is *North By Northwest*.

Paul Daniels' favourite film was *The Wizard Of Oz*. "I don't like movies that make you think."





# ALWAYS MEET YOUR HEROES



Far left: Creative Director Chris Lupton joins The League Of Gentlemen. Left: John Boyega's 24th birthday, in the Empire office. Above: Frodo and Harry, together at last! Below right: The ebullient Adam West.

- If you miss a football match to interview Tom Cruise, he'll email you afterwards to say he hopes Liverpool "smashed it".
- If you reunite the Goonies they will yell, "HEY, YOU GUYS!" in unison; Steven Spielberg will join in.
- If you drive around Shanghai with Jackie Chan, he will blast Lionel Richie tunes and sing along. And later will let you carry around his two stuffed pandas.
- If Richard Harris thought you were looking nervous in an interview (we were), he

would take you to the pub for "a livener". Your 20-minute interview would end six hours later.

- Nothing compares to John Carpenter singing his *Halloween* theme to you.

- If Saffron Burrows thinks you're looking hungover in an interview (we were), she takes you for a fry-up. Her treat.

- Watching *The League Of Gentlemen's* Tubbs and Edward recreate the *Titanic* kiss scene in a studio in Manchester is as tremendous as it sounds.



## ➔ TILDA SWINTON IS FANTASTICALLY TILDA SWINTON.

"At around the halfway mark of our Zoom interview, I found myself staring at an indent on the sofa where Tilda Swinton had previously been sitting. The doorbell had rung, and after a polite apology, the actor had ducked out and left me in the company of her five dozing spaniels. "I'm so sorry," she said, climbing back over them to resume her spot. "That was the fish lady." To be clear, not a half-woman, half-fish, but a woman who sells fish that Swinton needed to make a pie for her son." BETH WEBB

Marco Vitar, Alamy, Getty Images, Vector That Fox

## TOTALLY RANDOM

Chris Tarrant's favourite film is *The Deer Hunter*.

➔

Nick Faldo's favourite film is the Gary Player video on how to master bunkers.

➔

Jon Bon Jovi has never seen a *Carry On* film.

➔

Jordan Peele loves *The Never-Ending Story*.

➔

On the day the first issue of

*Empire* went on sale, Brad Pitt had \$800 in his bank account, and spent \$600 of it travelling to see his girlfriend.

Tommy Lee Jones thinks CGI was

the best thing to happen to film in the 1990s.

➔

Martin Scorsese watched a report about Oasis breaking up on Sky News.

➔

The most outrageous thing Andy Garcia ever read about himself was that he had a twin brother who died at birth and was growing out of his shoulder.

➔

On his 40th birthday, Patrick Stewart went for a run in Tipperary and sprained his ankle leaping away from a lorryload of sheep.

➔

"There's something about a moustache that says, 'I'm a man who makes decisions by myself.'" Says Henry Cavill.

➔

● Having Ralph Macchio bust out Miyagi-do karate moves for you is magnificent.

● If you get them together for the first time ever, Daniel Radcliffe and Elijah Wood will instantly hit it off and by the end will be exchanging details and talking about collaborating one day. Real magic.

● If you'd interviewed Richard Donner, he might write you a delightful thank-you letter.

● If you tweet John Boyega, inviting him to the office for birthday cake, he will turn up an hour later, and do a *Star Wars* quiz with you.

● After a photoshoot with him, Tom Hanks will send the photographer an antique typewriter as a thank-you gift.

● Even at 88, Adam West was an absolutely delightful bundle of Bat-joy.

● Rick Moranis will share his clothes with you. When it rained during an outside interview, he put our jeans in the tumble dryer and let us wear a pair of his squash shorts while we waited for the cycle to finish. Then, after taking them out, he said, "Honey, I shrunk your jeans!"

● Interview John Woo and he will send you a Christmas card without fail every year for the next decade.



Left: Executive Editor Chris Hewitt joins Tom Holland on stage for the 500th Empire Podcast. Below left: Aquaman the bassman.

a bat" but, Burton told us, "he'd look like a bad silent-movie star".

► On *Birds Of Prey*, Margot Robbie ordered a different fancy-dress theme for the crew every Friday. When we visited, it was "Hawaii".

► On set of Matt Reeves' *The Batman*, Robert Pattinson was banned from driving the Batmobile alone after stunt-driving around in it for 25 minutes.

► To avoid Spidey spoilers, Tom Holland will lie to you.

► However, he doesn't care about spoilers during a live podcast when a film is out because, "If you haven't seen it, that's your fault."

► When Danai Gurira first met Ryan Coogler to hear about *Black Panther*, she got so excited that she couldn't find her car.

► On *Ghost Rider*, Nicolas Cage believed he was Ghost Rider. He loaded his costume with "magical trinkets", wouldn't talk to cast or crew, and "saw the fear in their eyes".

► Set-visits are not for the spoiler-sensitive. On *Thor: The Dark World* we saw Thor telling Erik that Loki was dead. (Needless to say, though, it wasn't the last we saw of the trickster god.)

► Chris Pratt shares traits with Parks and Recreation's Andy Dwyer. When we met him on set of *Guardians Of The Galaxy Vol. 2*, the moment he sat down, he spilled his coffee over our Dictaphone.

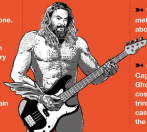
► On *Thor: Ragnarok*, Taika Waititi had his own tea trolley. He makes very nice tea.

► If you shoot Jared Leto as the Joker for a cover, he'll want the main theme from *The Shining* to be playing.

► Kevin Feige doesn't love it if you call him 'Captain Marvel'.

► On set of *Aquaman*, Jason Momoa carried a bass guitar around with him, and twanged it between takes.

► Tim Burton and Michael Keaton spent a long time wondering how Batman should move. They tried having him "dart around like



## ► IT'S EXCITING TO GET INTO THE BATMOBILE, BUT YOU MIGHT GET LOCKED IN.

"I was asked if I wanted to get into the Batmobile on set of *The Dark Knight Rises*. As I clambered in, special-effects technician Andy Aitken slammed down the door above me and said, 'Do not press the red button!' So, I sat very still in the relative quiet of the cabin. And sat there... And sat there... Long minutes passed in that cramped interior, with hardly any visibility of the world outside. Eventually the hatch flipped open. 'Bit of a stiff latch, that one!' Aitken grinned as I hauled myself out, a little flushed. And I completely forgot to ask what the red button did." DAN JOLIN



On set of *The World*, everybody had to leave their phones behind because they'd interfere with the electronics and the dinosaurs would

do things they weren't supposed to be doing. Said Pete Postlethwaite.

The most outrageous thing Pierce Brosnan ever read about

himself was that he had a wig and it was in danger of flying off.

For his 41st birthday, Willem Dafoe planted some trees.

Jean-Claude Van Damme once saw a ghost in the mirror while brushing his teeth. He felt cold.

*Die Hard* director John McTiernan names his dogs

after monsters. "My last one was Beria, after Stalin's lawyer."

At the Golden Globes one year, Stephen Merchant couldn't keep

his eyes off Arnold Schwarzenegger's "extraordinary" head.

Bob Hoskins never went to the cinema.

Nick Nolte used to own a crow, after it fell out of a tree and he picked it up and bonded with it.

John Malkovich once part-owned a hotel in Wales.



(AND OTHER STAR WARS SECRETS)



► If you ask Ian McDiarmid if he plays with his Palpatine action figure, he'll tell you that's a disgraceful question, then answer, "Yes."

► If you buy a lightsaber online for a photoshoot with Samuel L. Jackson, make sure that it's life-size. It might arrive the size of a pencil.

► Thankfully, Samuel L. Jackson has his own lightsaber, which he kept from the films. It says "BMF" (for Bad Mother Fucker) on it.

► George Lucas quite enjoys a Wagamama.

► If you interview Domhnall Gleeson about *Star Wars* but he thinks the interview's about his *Winnie-The Pooh*-film, everyone will end up confused.

► Mark Ruffalo's daughter draws Groot on other kids' shoes at school for money.



► Temuera Morrison has watched a lot of *Coronation Street* episodes. Watford, where he shot *Aquaman 2*, reminds him of *Coronation Street*.

► On set of the *Star Wars* sequels, Daisy Ridley was nicknamed "Baby Dazzle".

► After *The Empire Strikes Back* was released, airline stewardesses would go up to Billy Dee Williams and say, "You betrayed Han Solo!"



► George Lucas' direction to the actor playing the Wampa was, "Slower. Dumber."

► On set of *The Rise Of Skywalker*, J.J. Abrams kept asking Shirley Henderson to yell, "Hehey!" as Babu Frik "for a laugh".

► *Attack Of The Clones* is not a five-star film.



Top to bottom: Digital Editor-in-Chief James Dyer finds his calling as Darth Vader; Daisy Ridley as Rey; Groot; Samuel L. Jackson, shot for issue 353. Right: Expert bag-packer Kristen Bell.

## TOTALLY RANDOM

Arnold Schwarzenegger turned down the role of *Animal Mother* in *Full Metal Jacket* as he "didn't have time".

Mark Hamill was furious about Brexit.

Most directors say "cut" when they end a scene. Guy Ritchie says "cuttage".

Mads Mikkelsen can do a handstand for longer than Gemma Arterton.

J.J. Abrams has Simon Pegg's severed head in his office.

James Belushi is absolutely massive in Bulgaria.

After *Bee Movie*, Ray Liotta was given a jar of "Ray Liotta Honey". It's still in his kitchen. He thinks it's "disgusting".

Michael Cera is obsessed with the video game *Battletoads*.

There are a lot of stupid people in the world. And most of them are critics. So Ken Russell told *Empire*.

Michael Douglas calls Danny DeVito 'De Veets'.

A fart on a plane is the worst smell in the world, says Sam Neill.

Isla Fisher can diagnose most illnesses.

Matthew McConaughey is scared of backflips.

Gene Hackman wrote a novel set in the Civil War, in which there's an erotic scene containing the sentence, "His sex hung between his legs like a sack of hot lead..."

Explaining *Inception* to Roger Moore was as difficult as you'd expect.

Craig Roberts was once given Eminem's number, but he's never texted him and he never would.

Shailene Woodley is scared of dinosaurs.

Kristen Bell can pack luggage "like a motherfucker".

If you give it Chapter Two five stars, someone on Twitter ask if you're on drugs.

Martin Scorsese really loves *Curb Your Enthusiasm*.

The first character Julia Stiles played was called Senator Barbara Bonkers.

Michael Bay has a computer desktop folder called 'New Bay Shit'.

The person Brendan Fraser was most starstruck by was Benny Hill.

According to Brendan Fraser, there are microarts that we don't know about.

*Hard Target* was screened daily on the *Alien Vs Predator: Requiem* set.

Paul Newman's first words to Sam Mendes were, "Jesus fucking Christ, you're young."

Andy Serkis loves the sight of his own blood.

Possibly related: Andy Serkis would eat his own legs if his life depended on it.

Dennis Hopper used to park his car in his house. A wall raised like a garage door and the car was driven directly into the living room.

Danny Glover wears shoes that look kind of like human feet.



# EVERYBODY LOVES MUPPETS

## THEY HAVE FAVOURITES

400  
THINGS WE'VE  
LEARNED

### MISS PIGGY

Angela Lansbury

Liam Neeson

Orlando Bloom

### FOZZIE

Danny McBride

### ANIMAL

Amy Poehler

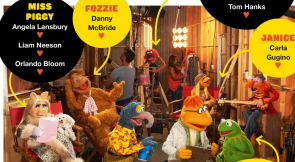
Guillermo del Toro

Daniel Craig

Tom Hanks

### JANICE

Carla Gugino



### GONZO

Ryan Reynolds

### COOKIE MONSTER

Danny Dyer

### MR SNUFFLEUPAGUS

Danny DeVito  
Jim Carrey

### BUNSEN HONEYDEW

Edgar Wright

### BEAKER

Geoffrey Rush  
Bradley Cooper

### STATLER AND WALDOF

Ray Winstone  
Will Ferrell

Christopher Nolan  
Jason Bateman

### FLOYD

Simon Pegg

### SWEETUMS

Nick Park

### SAM THE EAGLE

Zack Snyder

### ROBIN

Ricky Gervais

### THE COUNT

John Carpenter

### "ERNIE THE FROG"

David Yates

### "WALT DISNEY"

Rutger Hauer

### KERMIT

Tom Cruise

Jon Favreau

Jerry Bruckheimer

Duncan Jones

Abbie Cornish

"I remember there was some guy with a balloon."

Gary Busey

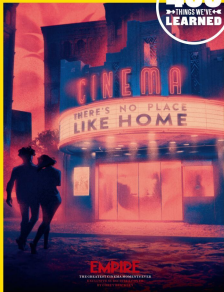
"I'm a human Muppet!"

Werner Herzog

"I do not know Jim Henson and I do not know the Muppets."

### ► KERMIT IS REAL

"Oh God. Kermit is real. Interviewed him on set of *Muppets Most Wanted*. Muppet store room. Body parts everywhere. Looks like a Muppet abattoir. Sit down. Puppeteer Steve Whitmire in full view. Kermit on his lap. Black arm-stick visible. Magic gone. Interview starts. Kermit speaks. Whitmire's there, his hand is up Kermit's bum, he's doing the voice, but he vanishes. It's just me, alone, talking to a frog. It is alive. It is Muppet voodoo. We talk about chicken visas, Kermit's favourite A road (the A40), the tuxedo he's wearing ("The size is Extra Spindly"). It is 40 minutes I will take to the grave. Kermit is real." SIMON CROOK



# A FILM MAGAZINE CAN SURVIVE WITHOUT FILMS

What does a magazine devoted to cinema do when Hollywood — that golden, thrumming industry around which we have always orbited — shuts down like a malfunctioning computer? That's the question we had to ask ourselves in early 2020, when Covid struck and the packed release schedule turned into a barren wasteland, only the odd film (like the one in which Russell Crowe gets angry in a car) blowing through like tumbleweed. The answer was, of course, to keep going. While scary, it turned out to be in some ways a golden period, as we put out issues fuelled by passion, with actors and directors with nothing to promote but a shared love of movies pitching in. Best of all, it brought us and you, the readers, closer together while we all dreamed of better days. As the world has slowly righted itself and cinema projectors flicker once more, we know we can survive the worst. But please, Hollywood, don't do it again. NICK DE SEMLYEN, EDITOR



GOING

A Viking man with a bloody face lies on the ground in front of a wooden house. The scene is set in a rural, medieval-like environment with a wooden house and a horse in the background.

ROBERT EGGERS'

WILD, MAD, BRUTAL

VIKING EPIC

## THE NORTHMAN

IS THE DIRECTOR'S

BIGGEST, MOST

AMBITIOUS FILM YET.

# BERSERK

AND, AS *EMPIRE*

DISCOVERS, SOME

OF THE BLOOD,

SWEAT AND TEARS

WERE FOR REAL

WORDS ALEX GOODFREY



THERE'S A SHOT in *The Northman* that says everything you need to know about the film. Alexander Skarsgård, topless and ripped, axe in hand and wearing a wolf's head for a helmet, squats down with similar Viking berserkers, about to pillage a village. From up high, a spear hurtles towards them; Skarsgård springs up, grabs it in mid-air, spins around and throws it right back, killing the sap who sent it. This is a huge, violent, bonkers movie. And, because it's a Robert Eggers joint, heavily steeped in research,

That "fight move," Eggers tells *Empire*, comes directly from one of the Old Icelandic sagas, hulking historical opuses from around the 12th century. Those Vikings, they loved set-pieces. And, it turns out, one-liners. "The sagas can sometimes read like '80s action movies," says Eggers. "There's this scene in *Njáls Saga* where this dude Skarphóðinn slides across the ice, whacks some guy in the head [with an axe] and his teeth spill out all over the place, and he says something like, 'That's what I call a headache.'"

The director of *The Witch* and *The Lighthouse* was wary of how this all might look on screen. At one point, he says, his Icelandic co-writer Sjón wrote a sequence "that felt over-the-top to me. I said, 'You know in *The Two Towers* when Orlando Bloom takes the shield and rides it like a skateboard down the stairs? I don't want to go that far.' And Sjón said, 'I totally agree with you... but the Old Ones would have loved that scene.'"

This is what Eggers grappled with on *The Northman*. How big is too big? Could he upscale so substantially without losing what it is that makes him him? His previous films were small,

contained affairs. *The Northman* is a sprawling behemoth, with big studio money (a reported \$60 million budget). Shot in Northern Ireland and Iceland, it's a classical Viking drama, drawing from those old Icelandic sagas, with scope to match.

Éthan Hawke, who plays King Aurvandil, was excited to get a call from Eggers, because he was "flat-out floored by *The Lighthouse*. And this one is reaching for so much. It's like he found an ancient Viking scroll in the bottom of a treasure chest lost in a cave off the coast of Norway or something," he laughs. "It's an amazing text. I've often complained, 'How come nobody even tries to make *Apocalypse Now* anymore?'"

Eggers agrees this one was a leap. "We were making a film that we had no business making," he says of himself and his team — many of whom had worked on his previous films. Early on in pre-production, he was asked to walk crewmembers through that village-raid sequence, and reality hit home. "I stared at my shoes in silence for 20 seconds and then said, 'I need a moment,'" he recalls. "It was at times paralyzing. We got there. But it was a lot." The whole film is a lot. "It's a beast," he says. "It's a bit of a beast."

But taming that beast was, by all accounts, adrenalinising. "The thing that's exciting when a human being takes a dare is, it gives everybody courage," says Hawke. "Robert's really taking a dare: can he do what he's done with his first two films, on a big stage?" It certainly wasn't easy.

AS FAR BACK as he can remember, Alexander Skarsgård always wanted to be a Viking. "I'd had this obsession with Viking culture and Norse mythology since I was a wee lad," says the Swedish actor, talking to *Empire* from Stockholm, his hometown. For decades the Skarsgårds have owned a country home on Baltic island Ljusterö and there, as a kid, Skarsgård would marvel at the old rune stones dotted about the place while his grandfather explained what it all meant. Skarsgård was hooked, giving his two younger brothers middle Viking names. "So my brother Gustaf's middle name is Orm, which means snake, and my other brother Sam's middle name is Ymer, which was the first giant, the ancestor to all the giants in Norse mythology."

It wasn't a phase. For years he wanted to make a Viking film, eventually getting together with friend Lars Knudsen — who'd produced *The Witch* — to make it happen, and when Skarsgård met Eggers for a lunch five years ago to discuss working together, talk quickly turned to longships. "We ended up speaking about the Vikings for two hours," remembers Skarsgård. Eggers had recently been on holiday in Iceland, and berserker thoughts had already been simmering, so he was immediately







Clockwise from top left: Director Robert Eggers and Gael García Bernal as the Bang as *Piglet*; Ben Brinkley as *Brotherless*; Olga Orán as *The Birch Forest*; Anja Taylor-Joy and Viking prince Amleth (Alexander Skarsgård) brave the icy seas; "Last one to the top is a wuss..." — Skarsgård flexes his muscles as cast and crew look on enviously



enthusiastic when Skarsgård mooted a film. "Well, I have the Viking-est actor sitting in front of me, who discloses to me that one of my friends and him had been trying to make a Viking movie for several years," says Eggers. Destiny called.

Eggers began working on a revenge story, finding inspiration in the tale of Prince Amleth of Jutland by 12th-century Danish author Saxo Grammaticus — the story that later inspired Shakespeare's *Hamlet*. He then joined forces with Icelandic poet and novelist Sjöfn, and they wrote a screenplay drawing from the Old Icelandic sagas, creating their own violent, mad mythological stew.

The *Northman* is not *Hamlet*. The bones are there, but that's about it. "Dad is killed by uncle, takes the mom, kid needs to kill the uncle — there you go," laughs Eggers, describing the plot in the tiniest of nutshell. "We wanted this to be *the* Viking movie." Yet, a Robert Eggers movie. It begins with squawking ravens; within minutes there are men crawling about on all fours like dogs, burping and farting. The plot has plenty of perversity and much mysticism, notably from Björk's seeress and Anya Taylor-Joy's white witch (although, says Eggers, "I don't want people expecting *Storm* from the X-Men").

Then, of course, there's the historical accuracy. "We could talk ad nauseum about what a freak for detail Robert Eggers is," says Willem Dafoe, re-teaming with him after his lunatic turn in *The Lighthouse* to play the King's jester, Heimir the Fool. Indeed, if he had his way, Eggers would have had every character in *The Northman* speaking in Old Norse and Old Slavic; but, this being a big-budget studio film, such indulgences would not have taken flight. Elsewhere, though, he went for it. "There are scenes where in the ocean you'll see a Viking ship, blurry, in the deep background, so it could have been anything," says Skarsgård — "but Rob insisted on building a Viking ship and having it out there." The authenticity of the costumes and props goes without saying.

"I feel hesitant about saying this because it's horn-tooting," explains Eggers, "but about the approach of this idea of accuracy, it just puts everyone on the same page about what we're after. So everyone knows what the golden fish we're fishing for is."

The goal, as it always is with Eggers' films, is time travel. "It must have been rough to be

**Clockwise from above:**  
A grim-looking Bang as the murderous Fjörleif; Hase white steed, will travel — Olaf traverses the mudflats in style; Ethan Hawke as King Aurvandil; Nicole Kidman as Queen Gudrún; Amleth's mother.



around back then," says Claes Bang, the Danish actor who plays the king's murderous brother Fjörleif. "It was always icy fucking cold and they had no clothes to put on, no food. This film has that. It's not romanticised." Everybody endured intense challenges to achieve the end result. And some enjoyed that more than others.

**W**HEN WE MEET Skarsgård's adult Amleth, decades after he's fled his traumatic home, he's an *úlfheðnar* berserker — a wolf warrior — working on Viking raids. Skarsgård is an absolute unit in the film. "Amleth is used as the tip of the spear during these raids," he says. "So it was important that he looked terrifying. His sole purpose was to slaughter, to be sent in and wreak havoc. His body was a weapon, so it had to be believable that you would throw him straight into the lion's den and he would fight his way out."

Specifically, explains Eggers, an *úlfheðnar* berserker is "a warrior who believes that they're transforming into an animal in an ecstatic state before they go into battle." The scene climaxes with Amleth biting someone's throat out and repeatedly roaring at the sky. Again, this comes straight from the Icelandic sagas — specifically

from *Eggr's Saga*, in which the protagonist does just that. As the saga reads: "My teeth solved my troubles/And tore out his throat."

Adding to the demands of the shoot, Eggers filmed most sequences with just one camera, resulting in, often, 30 or so takes to get everything right. This was one of them. "It was the end of a very long, complex shot of the Viking berserkers raiding a Slav village," continues Skarsgård. "The choreography was so difficult, with all these elements, 50 people fighting simultaneously, the extras and the horses... making it look perfect was a real undertaking. That climax, where I rip a guy's throat out and howl at the moon... it was primal. I just let it all out," he laughs. "I was exhausted, and I think you see it in the shot. I was a wreck. Truly a wreck."

And he didn't get much respite for the rest of the film. "It was by far, physically and mentally, the most challenging movie I've ever worked on," he says. "It was cold, we were up in the mountains of Northern Ireland, late fall, a lot of night shoots, and these really, really long, complicated fight sequences were incredibly difficult to shoot. There's so much adrenaline rushing through your body, for six months, that I was completely depleted once we wrapped the movie. But it was incredibly rewarding."



Anya Taylor-Joy, who plays the gloriously titled Olga Of The Birch Forest, an enslaved Slavic woman — and yes, a white witch — who allies with Amleth, was all in. She was used to Eggers' working practices, having had her career launched with *The Witch*. "I loved it," she says of *The Northman*. "I thrive being out in the open and battling the elements. If you're making a Rob Eggers film, that's implicit when you sign on." Yet even she found her limits. "We're so lucky to do the job that we do, I try not to complain ever," she says. "There was one scene where the mud was up to my knees. I wasn't wearing shoes and the mud had frozen. And because I don't complain, at one point when [cinematographer] Jarin [Blaschke] heard me squeak, 'Can we please roll?', he was like, 'Okay — Anya's cold. It's bad.'"

Hawke loved it too. "All that tactile dirt-cold blood-sweat-and-tears aspect of it just turns me on. It makes acting easier," he says. "What sucks is when the weather's bad and it's uncomfortable and you know you're making something that doesn't aspire for anything; that's when you want to kill yourself. When you know there's a chance that what you're doing might really be special, then all of a sudden it's not so cold." Willem Dafoe wasn't out in the cold, although his baddie, braided Heimir is an

insalubrious character — much more than a mere jester — and Dafoe displays some unhinged physical talents. "That's alright," he says of the madness he had to dive into. "I like doing that."

Claes Bang did not enjoy the physical demands. He loved the "relentless brutality" of the script, but the mere mention of making the film takes him right back to the 2020 shoot, and he's still shuddering. "It was cold and rainy and miserable," he says. "I now know that the big accomplishment of the Vikings was not sailing those ships across the Atlantic over to North America — the big accomplishment was getting through life in footwear that shit. What we basically had was a leather sock. You couldn't get any grip; it was slippery as fuck. And you were just fucking cold all the time. Everybody had gangrene at the end of the day and had to have their 'feet' taken off and new ones fitted in the morning because it was like, 'Oh, for fuck's sake.' I thought it was rough. Really, I did."

He didn't get a kick out of it like the others, then? "No, no, no, it's definitely not for me. I just fucking hated it, I thought it was horrible." He hasn't seen the film yet and hopes that his misery benefited his performance. "It will probably fit quite well with the brutal feeling that the script has," he says. It's all for the greater good.

**S** KARSGÅRD — THE VIKING-obsessed kid who started this all — hasn't shaken it off, either. The film is "beyond what I dreamed of," he says. So much so that he's "having a hard time connecting with other projects" being offered. "It's a tough act to follow. A lot of stuff that I might have said yes to a couple of years ago, I'm just not that keen on doing anymore. I feel a bit lost. I don't know where to go from here. This experience... it definitely changed me. I think it changed most people who were on that mountain top."

It was certainly a new experience for Eggers. "When you go from making a modestly budgeted two-hander or a film like *The Witch*," says Dufoe, "to leap to this grand Viking film... The thing that impressed me is, none of the detail went away. He was everywhere. He was on top of everything."

It was a lot, though, for Eggers to take on. He was constantly weighing up how big to go. "I had my key collaborators, who are very honest and tell me when I'm full of shit, if I am," he says. "And they want to enable me to be myself. They'll even say, 'That's not you.' Yet he didn't have full control. 'This is a very expensive movie and I didn't have final cut because of it — in post [production] it got tense,' he reveals. "It got very tense. It was difficult to continue to figure out how to integrate the studio notes while making sure this was something I was really proud of. I think I accomplished it, but it wasn't easy." But while that process "was frustrating, and the relationship with the studio through post was difficult, it made the film better," he says. In what way? "It was my intention to make the most entertaining, approachable Robert Eggers movie with *The Northman*. And some things that were my initial thought of how to do that were not the best." The difficult collaboration, he says, paid off.

This is *The Northman*. A berserk, bizarre, brutal and bloody beast of a film that nearly broke some of those involved. Prepare for pain. ●

THE NORTHMAN IS IN CINEMAS FROM 11 APRIL

# THE KEYMASTER

**IVAN REITMAN** UNLOCKED A NEW BREED OF  
COMEDY FILM: HEARTWARMING, WITTY AND TOTALLY  
OFF THE CHAIN. HERE, COLLABORATORS AND FAMOUS FANS  
WRITE EXCLUSIVE TRIBUTES TO A GIANT OF JOY

ILLUSTRATION: PAUL SHIPPEN







# "HE MADE ME REALISE THAT BEING FUNNY COULD HAVE POWER"

**KUMAIL NANJANI**

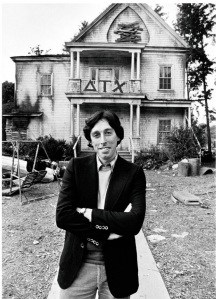
ACTOR/WRITER

I WOULD NOT be a comedian or an actor if it weren't for Ivan Reitman. *Ghostbusters* looms very large in my life: it's literally my single favourite thing in the world (along with my wife). It has this anti-authority streak that runs through a lot of Ivan's work. As a kid, you feel powerless. Watching these people not being taken seriously who then turn out to save New York and the world was a fantasy coming true for me. I think that thematically resonated for me, even if I couldn't articulate it.

Watching *Ghostbusters*, I realised that being funny could have power. It felt like magic — if they could make scary ghosts funny, they could make anything funny. That's a real superpower. And it also had this improvisational feel to it. The way they were speaking felt more like normal people hanging out, how my friends and I were talking (although we're not nearly as witty). We've all seen a lot of comedy where the improvisation has gone off the rails and it just feels like two characters trying to make each other laugh. If you think of Peter Venkman in *Ghostbusters*, it's all to serve his character's point of view: with everything he says, you get to know him a bit more, or it moves the story along. *Ghostbusters* is the first time we see Bill Murray and go, "Oh, that's the Bill Murray we know." In *Stripes* you can see he's working it out; in *Ghostbusters*, it's fully formed. Obviously, Bill and Ivan were close creative partners, crafting who "Bill Murray" was.

I think what Ivan's work does at its best is go against the grain. Casting Arnold Schwarzenegger and Danny DeVito as twins is completely unexpected. His movies always felt a little dangerous to me. They were doing something that movies weren't supposed to be doing. *Animal House* [which Reitman produced] has that. *Stripes* has that. *Ghostbusters* has that. Even *Dave* has that — it's a movie about the importance of kindness over politics, and that in itself was a subversive idea at the time. I watched it the day I heard Ivan passed. That film is a miracle because it does so many different things. It's really, really funny. It's really, really warm. The chemistry between Kevin Kline and Sigourney Weaver is so good. It's a kind, hilarious movie. A friend said *Dave* was *Ted Lasso* before *Ted Lasso*.

There are two things I've taken from his work.



**Top:** *Ghostbusters* Egon Spengler (Harold Ramis), Winston Zeddemore (Ernie Hudson), Peter Venkman (Bill Murray) and Ray Stantz (Dan Aykroyd). **Above:** Ivan Reitman on the set of *Animal House* in 1978. **Right:** Sigourney Weaver and Kevin Kline in *Dave*.

Firstly, the importance of improvisation, of being present in the moment, trying to affect the other person's performance. Ivan's impact comes from the sense of improvisation that is now seen as ubiquitous in comedy. I think that started with him. The other thing is I always wanted my comedy not to feel mean. I decided to define my work, especially as a stand-up by what I loved, not by what I hated. I think that comes from Ivan because the love he had for his characters is really palpable. There is nothing cynical about his movies. They are anti-authority but they are not political. They are open-hearted.

He's also taken things that you wouldn't think would be funny — ghosts, the army, politics — and put them inside the realm of comedy. That is something he has left us with: anything can be funny if you approach it with intelligence and humanity.





**Above:** Bill Murray's John Winger enjoys another run-in with drill sergeant Hikka (Warren Oates) in *Stripes*. **Left:** Arnold Schwarzenegger upending expectations in *Kindergarten Cop*.

## "I WANTED TO MAKE A THEATRE FULL OF PEOPLE SCREAM WITH LAUGHTER THE WAY IVAN DID"

### PAUL FEIG

WRITER/DIRECTOR

LIKE EVERY OTHER comedy nerd, from the moment I saw *Mearballs* on its opening weekend, I was an Ivan Reitman fan. My friends and I in Michigan would make each other laugh endlessly by reciting lines from *Stripes*, and when I saw *Ghostbusters* on opening night as a film student at USC, I knew I wanted to make movies like he did. Being in film school, I was surrounded by very serious film majors who all wanted to be the next Jean-Luc Godard. I wanted to be Ivan Reitman. To make a theatre full of people scream with laughter the way Ivan did the first time we all saw the Stay Puff Marshmallow Man or heard Bill Murray say, "He slimed me", and, "It's true, this man has no dick", that to me was a higher calling than any serious arthouse film. And Ivan was a master at doing it right.

So, imagine the feeling that would occasionally grip me out of nowhere when I'd be in a meeting or at a meal or on the set with Ivan when we were making *Ghostbusters: Answer The Call*. To get to know your heroes is one thing. To get to work with them is another. I discovered that not only was Ivan a great comedy director, he was a great producer too, knowing when to offer up his advice and guidance and when to step back and let you fulfill your vision, even if it was different than

he would have done. He wanted to let your voice be unique to your film the way his voice was unique to all of his, and he supported you fully when he saw your passion. He knew how to cut to the heart of a problem with a solution that was simple and elegant, and he felt all triumphs deeply. After our final test screening, where some reshoots we had worked on took our audience scores from good to great, Ivan came up to me in the lobby, gripped my arm and said very emotionally, "I'm so happy for you I could cry." I'll never forget that moment and the sincere look in his eyes for the rest of my life. That's how much he cared about what he did and the people he worked with.

Comedy directors don't die. They just step to the back of the theatre and let the audience continue to enjoy their work, continue to make them laugh with the decisions they made and with the people they put on the screen. They continue to affect audiences with the dialogue they oversaw and the ideas they hatched, with the emotions and messages they hid inside the funny and with the positivity they put into the world. Comedy directors just want you to have fun, and Ivan brought us more fun than we will ever be able to thank him for. But right now, I'll try.

Thank you, Ivan, from all of us, for making this world a much funnier place. We will never forget you.





**Above left:** Reitman and Todd Phillips chat between takes on *Road Trip*, Phillips' first feature. **Above:** Arnold Schwarzenegger and Danny DeVito, unlikely siblings in *Twins*. **Left:** Bill Murray takes the lead in *Stripes*.

## "HE SET THE BLUEPRINT FOR MODERN-DAY FILM COMEDY"

**TODD PHILLIPS**

WRITER/DIRECTOR

IVAN REITMAN MEANT the world to me. He set the blueprint for modern-day film comedy, not just with his irreverent tone (slobs versus snobs) — but also because of his brilliant eye for casting, which most filmmakers will tell you is 70 per cent of the battle. His spot-on use of Bill Murray, Harold Ramis, Ernie Hudson, Rick Moranis, Arnold Schwarzenegger... the list goes on. He had a wicked knack for casting and always knew where the joke was.

Coming of age in the 1980s, his comedies were everything. I remember seeing *Stripes* in a movie

theatre as a kid, and hearing those laughs — it literally made me want to "do that" as a career. But I really had no idea how to make "that" happen. All that changed, ironically, when I met Ivan Reitman. He had heard about my documentary *Frat House* from his son Jason and asked me if I would screen it for him in Los Angeles. After the screening Ivan asked me, point blank — "Can you write?" Obviously I said, "Yes. Absolutely." Which may have been the only lie I told him over our 20-year friendship. The truth was, I hadn't written anything but the voice over my documentaries, but my belief is, if someone asks you something like that, just say yes and figure it out later.

So Ivan hired me to write and direct my first narrative feature, *Road Trip*. He was going to produce it under his brand-new deal at DreamWorks. But he did so much more than just "produce".

He put Scot Armstrong (my co-writer) and I through comedy boot camp. We lived at a hotel in Montecito (close to where Ivan resided) and spent months working on our script. Meeting almost daily for his feedback and notes. In many ways, he was an absolute terror when it came to comedy. Constantly pushing us to make it better and funnier and tighter. It was the greatest film school one could ask for and the greatest reward was handing him a scene, watching him read it and hearing him laugh. He had the best laugh.

About a month before I was set to leave to go to shoot the film, Ivan would take me to lunch every day. He knew I had never been on an actual film set before, so he was walking me through the first week. What to do. How to deal with the crew, the actors etc. It was beyond generous and beyond helpful. I would literally sit there and take notes. One day, we walked into [restaurant] Mr Chow for my "class" and Billy Wilder was sitting at "his" table on the left. Ivan said hello and paid enormous respect to Mr Wilder and then, without missing a beat, introduced me! It was fucking surreal.

While he wasn't on set much (we were shooting in Atlanta), Ivan's real footprint came in the editing room. We would sit in that tiny office at DreamWorks and pore over the footage and the edits. He wasn't always nice about it either, which I came to appreciate. We had a lot of fights in that tiny room. The poor editor never turned around, never spoke up — he didn't want to poke the bear. He would just hear the back and forth between Ivan and I as we argued over a minuscule edit. After one particularly brutal fight, there was a long, painful silence until I finally said, "These little rooms weren't made for three Jews," and Ivan just started to crack up. There was that laugh again, that laugh that meant everything. We went and had lunch at Art's Deli and it was like it never happened. That laugh is how I choose to remember him.

Above: Getty Images; Landmark; Photofest; Shutterstock





# "WHAT COULD BE BETTER THAN BEING ON THE RECEIVING END OF THAT LAUGH?"

**PHIL LORD AND CHRISTOPHER MILLER**

WRITERS/DIRECTORS

THE LIST OF bold-name filmmakers that captured our interest as we came of age in Hollywood is more or less unending. But the list of filmmakers who ever took a serious interest in us is pretty short. And the most surprising of them all was Ivan Reitman.

"Half of this movie is the best movie I have ever seen."

"What about the other half?"

"The other half is terrible."

We laughed super-hard. He wasn't laughing. We had just screened *Spider-Man: Into the Spider-Verse* for one of our movie heroes, Ivan Reitman. And he was about to spend a week helping us make our movie better, for no reason other than he thought it could be.

We had met Ivan years before. He had taken a shine to a couple of our movies and wanted to meet (at [Beverly Hills deli] Nate 'n Al's, notch). This is the only time in our career this has ever really happened. An older filmmaker we looked up to reaching out and offering wisdom. We lapped it up like a giant plate of matzo brei.

What Ivan didn't know is that the first director we ever saw behind the camera was Ivan. In a "making of" piece that used to run on HBO about *Ghostbusters*. And what we remembered more than anything was his laugh. Warm, generous, and infectious. What could be



Clockwise from top left: Bill Murray, Sigourney Weaver and tiny co-star in *Ghostbusters 2*; Reitman, now in his producer's hat, with leads Carrie Coon, McKenna Grace, and Finn Wolfhard on the set of son Jason's (far right) *Ghostbusters: Afterlife*; A pregnant Annie in *Junior*, with Danny DeVito and Emma Thompson; Uma Thurman and Luke Wilson in Reitman's *My Super Ex-Girlfriend*; Reitman as producer on *Space Jam*.



better than being on the receiving end of that laugh? And what's more, the way the piece was edited, he seemed like he thought everything was funny.

This is not true.

That part had to be earned. Because Ivan wasn't just interested in whether a movie was funny. He was interested in whether it was good. He centered character and emotion in his films even when the premises were ridiculous. He saw the potential for the same in *Spider-Verse*. He came to the edit. He sat for hours having coffee and discussing copious notes he took down. He had no reason to do this. He seemed to have been equally hard on his own movies. He told us how he had to cut out the first 30 minutes of *Twins* because "it put everyone to sleep!" And what we learned from him is that loving a movie meant relentlessly challenging it to be its best self.

We did the notes. And lots of other people's too. And lo, the movie got better.

We showed the next cut to some friends, and Ivan came. Halfway through, we looked over to see what Ivan was doing, but we didn't have to. 'Cause we could hear it. We elbowed each other.

Ivan Reitman was laughing.

What could be better? ●



# OPEN YOUR EYES

In multidimensional mindbender  
**EVERYTHING EVERYWHERE ALL AT ONCE,**

Michelle Yeoh's laundrette owner takes a trip into  
a world of infinite possibilities... and googly eyes. As she  
and the film's cast and crew tell us, it was all or nothing

[WATCH THE TRAILER](#)



# WHEN YOU'RE FIGHTING WITH DILDOS, YOU DON'T REHEARSE WITH DILDOS.

There is a scene in *Everything Everywhere All At Once* in which a multiversal variant of Stephanie Hsu's character — dressed as Elvis — makes a man's head explode into confetti, and then summarily beats another guy to death with a pair of rubbery sex toys. "The sack is a good handle, you know?" laughs Hsu (who plays troubled daughter Joy and her dildowielding variant). She and the stunt team practised the fight scene with regular nunchucks before actual dildos were introduced for filming. "The dildos were quite bendable. So it really felt like a nunchuck."

Hsu shrugs it all off with a chuckle. "It was just another day in the multiverse office."

Dildo fight scenes are pretty standard fare for directors Daniel Kwan and Daniel Scheinert — known collectively as 'Daniels' — who fill their films with so much insanity that the benchmark for 'same' becomes murky. "Every time I set out to do a movie," Kwan explains, "I have this fear that I'm gonna die or something. Even when we were really young, we were like: 'This might be the last thing anyone ever lets us make! We better put everything into it!'" He laughs. "The threshold for 'everything' has slowly grown to the point where we made this movie."

This movie, as that title suggests, is a valiant attempt to chuck everything, including the kitchen sink, at the screen. (Plus, infinite multiverse variants of said proverbial sink.)

It's popping with ideas: about our place in the universe, about our relationships with our parents, about dealing with information overload in the internet age. "It's wildly inventive and original and outrageous and funny and action-packed," says Ke Huy Quan, who plays Joy's father Waymond... and a number of Waymond variants. "But at the end of the day, it's about love." He had faith from watching their previous film. "I saw *Swiss Army Man*," he says of Daniels' 2016 debut feature, starring Daniel Radcliffe as a gassy cadaver whose flatulence could power him across an ocean. "A corpse farts throughout the entire movie. I thought, 'If they can make me laugh, cry, fall in love, immerse myself in this absolutely outrageous story, I think they can do anything.'"

This is typical of Daniels, who are, according to Hsu, "self-proclaimed maximalists". They are filmmakers overloaded with inventiveness, and *Everything Everywhere All At Once* was a story they were able to craft about that. "We got to explore our own ADHD, too-many-ideas problem in a narrative," Scheinert says.

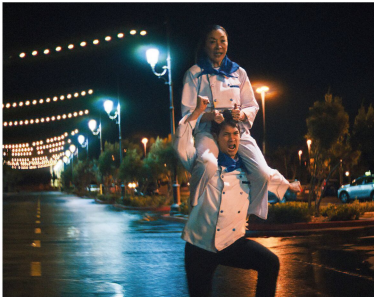
Here is a partial list of ways you could describe the film: it is a mind-bending multiversal science-fictioner; an energetic martial-arts action film in the Hong Kong tradition; a surreal, farcical and frequently filthy comedy; a heartfelt immigrant-family drama; and an existential, nihilistic exploration of life, the universe, everything. It is about an omniversal being of pure chaos who threatens to destroy all reality, a team of multiverse-jumpers trying to stop it — and, at the centre of it all, an Asian-American laundromat owner named Evelyn (played by Michelle Yeoh) who is just trying to do her taxes.

When the trailer debuted last December, it lit up the internet. Suddenly everyone was asking, "What the hell is this thing?" "We're just trying to fight anything that forces a categorisation," says Kwan. A film with literally everything in it defies easy description. But let's give it a shot, anyway.

## THE EARLY CLUES

for who could create such a chaotic, singular film can be found in Daniels' music videos, where the pair first made their name. Their promo for DJ Snake and Lil Jon's "Turn Down For What", for example — which has over a billion views on YouTube — centres on a man with a magical penis who parties so hard that said dick literally blows the roof off. His killer crutch-thrust dance-moves manage to smash through plant pots, baseball bats and three successive ceilings. The video was a sensation, a huge viral smash and a hit with everyone who saw it. Everyone, that is, except Daniels' parents. "I called my

Clockwise from main: Michelle Yeoh as family matriarch, laundrette owner and master of the multiverse Evelyn, here fighting fit; Yooh learning kung fu as one of Evelyn's variants; And on the shoulders of Harry Shum Jr. nomenclature — we kid you not — Ratsatouille; Evelyn and IRS nemesis Derride (James Lee Corti) find love in their hot-dog-fingered corner of the multiverse.





mother when she first saw 'Turn Down For What'. She was like, 'I think you should read more books,'" laughs Kwan. "She didn't understand it. And then 'Turn Down For What' got nominated for a Grammy. She got to come with me to the Grammys. It totally changed the way she thought of the video." This is a recurring theme for the pair. "Our parents are constantly having to deal with the fact that we are their kids," Kwan continues. "Like, 'I am the parent of the guy who made the *Farting Corpse Movie*.'" This idea, of a parent not

understanding their kid, bled into what eventually became *Everything Everywhere All At Once* — the intergenerational divide-turned-multiversal metaphor. "This movie in some weird way is a reflection of that," says Kwan. "The daughter is this strange creature, and the mother has to go on the journey to basically become a monster herself in order to connect with her. Hopefully it's a very gracious portrayal of our relationship with our parents."

Other impulses fuelled that initial spark, too. "There was a sci-fi idea," explains Scheinert. "And then over time, like, ten other things glommed on." The key to unlocking it was introducing the concept of an infinite multiverse, which allowed for infinite storytelling possibilities. "We're like, 'Ah, great! We can do our existential film that we've been wanting to make. It can be a playful sci-fi. It can be an Asian-American story. We can do

kung-fu fight scenes like we have always wanted to try..."

If that sounds like a lot, it was hard for Daniels themselves to make sense of at first. To help, they pored over "pop science" books, researching current theories on the multiverse — branching universe, eternal inflationary cosmology — and then "quickly invented a stupid, film-friendly version" of their on-screen multiverse, according to Scheinert.

The first draft of the script ran to almost 240 pages, including a now-deleted opening scene in which the main character gives a physics lesson while accidentally drawing a penis. It also featured a main character in the form of a middle-aged Asian woman who, through the power of the multiverse, becomes an interdimensional, ass-kicking action-hero. It was written for iconic Malaysian actor Michelle Yeoh. "By the time we reached out to her to play the part," Scheinert recalls, with a smile, "the character's name in the script was just 'Michelle'. We literally told our producers, 'We don't have a back-up. We really hope she likes it. Because we have zero other ideas.'" Daniels — rarely short of ideas — were betting all of their chips on Michelle Yeoh.



**HALFWAY THROUGH** her chat with *Empire*, Michelle Yeoh disappears. The connection on our Zoom call cuts out. Minutes later, she returns. "Oh my goodness!" she laughs. "I just jumped into another multiverse!"

Clearly, Yeoh is now entirely on board with the idea of branching timelines and cracks in reality, but when she first read the script, she wasn't sure what to make of it. "I had never read anything so crazy," she says. "I couldn't even wrap my head around that whole concept. I'm a dinosaur — I don't really know how to get online and Google things. They had me going, 'Maybe I don't really understand, but you know what? They have intrigued me.' And I love a challenge."

She was in good company. Jamie Lee Curtis (who plays Deirdre, the IRS tax agent who butts heads with Evelyn) "couldn't figure out what the fuck was going on" either. "The script was weird," Curtis says. "But the entire reason that I said yes to this little tiny weird movie was because I was getting to work with Michelle Yeoh. They say, 'You had me at hello' — well, they had me at Michelle Yeoh." Curtis even performed a rap on set in tribute to her co-star ("She is tiny, she is sweet, she will knock you off your feet").

Daniels were "blown away" by Yeoh, Kwan says. "We grew up on her more playful roles — her Jackie Chan movies like *Supercop 2*. I think as time went on, she got put in roles where she was very austere and proper. And this character is the opposite of all those things."

In the film, her character Evelyn soon learns to "verse-jump" — to temporarily link her consciousness with another version of herself from across the multiverse, accessing all their memories and skills — and a key variant sees Evelyn become a very Michelle Yeoh-like figure. It directly plays on her cinematic legacy; the film even includes real stock footage of Yeoh on the red carpet for *Crazy Rich Asians*. "It is very much tied into the DNA of Michelle as a human and as an actress," Kwan says.

That extended into the action. Rather than use a seasoned Hollywood stunt team, Daniels found their fight choreographers on YouTube, hiring a group who call themselves Martial Club, led by brothers Andy and Brian Le. "They're just fanboys!" says Scheinert. "The

amazing thing about these guys is they never went to a single martial-arts class," marvels Kwan. "Everything they know is from watching Hong Kong movies."

When Yeoh arrived on set, she found that her choreographers were, in fact, heavily influenced by her. "They told me: 'I watched all your movies, I studied all your moves, and I know how to do all of them,'" Yeoh recalls. "So when we choreographed the fight sequences, they knew everything I could do! It was doing the kind of things that I did when I started my career — a bit like Buster Keaton, Jackie Chan, Jet Li, all the greats. It was like walking down memory lane. It was fun."

Still, even a martial-arts legend can have too much fun. Occasionally, the madness of a Daniels shoot got to Yeoh. "She's a professional," says Kwan, "but every now and then this movie would break her brain in a way where she just couldn't work." One scene — in which two interdimensional soldiers are desperately fighting over a trophy they want to ram into their anuses, for multiversal reasons — had Yeoh "hysterical on the floor", in her words. Filming had to pause for ten minutes to allow her to collect herself.

"One of our favourite things in our movies," says Scheinert, "is those days where you get a bunch of really talented people together to do something stupid."





**THERE ARE A** lot of talented people doing stupid things in this film. “We were trying to find ways of pushing the multiverse to unexpected places, the further the movie went along,” says Scheinert. “We were trying to find out: how weird should it get?” The answer: pretty freakin’ weird.

For instance, one sequence is set in an alternate universe where humans have evolved to have hot-dog fingers for hands. Stay with us. In this universe, Evelyn and Deirdre are lovers, which meant film legends Michelle Yeoh and Jamie Lee Curtis spent a day on set wearing fake hands while lovingly shoving ketchup into each other’s faces. “I honestly thought it was a big joke,” says Yeoh about reading the scene for the first time. “I wanted to convince the Daniels to write it out of the film.” She found solidarity: “I think the two of us looked at each other and were like, ‘Yeah, I have no idea what the fuck this is,’” recalls Curtis. “But clearly these guys do. And they know it so well. You just surrender.”

Remarkably, for such a ridiculous set-up, there is a genuine emotional pay-off. The actors and directors took it deadly seriously. “We went into the different universes believing that is the real universe,” says Yeoh. “We have to live that moment and live how they would—even though, yes, they had weird digits.” Curtis goes further. “There’s a part of that sequence that was as moving for me as an actor as anything I’ve ever done,” she says, sincerely. “At the same time, we have hot-dog fingers and I use my feet as my affection tool.”

This was an important distinction for Daniels. It’s not just surrealism for surrealism’s sake. “We spent a lot of time trying to figure out how to push the envelope without doing a shock-value movie,” says Scheinert. “Even in the edit, there was a lot of discussion about how much of the dildos to show.” They might chuck all manner of dildos and hot-dog fingers at the screen, but are always “trying to ground it in something real, some sort of true emotion,” says Kwan. Behind all the puerile insanity, Daniels insist, is a genuine philosophical yearning: what does it all mean?

As a concept, “everything” can be quite a lot. For Daniels—filmmakers of a generation raised on the internet—the concept

of “everything” has become profound. When you have the sum of all knowledge and existence in your pocket, where do you even go from there? “I think we are struggling with this problem of meaning,” says Kwan. “How do we process all this information that we’re being inundated with every day?”

One possible response is nihilism: that in fact, it’s all meaningless. The film grapples with the idea that nothing matters. “When we first started writing this, we were like: ‘The bad guy is nihilist,’” says Scheinert. “And then the most interesting thing was, we actually related with that. We ended up feeling like, ‘Oh, this movie is about how a good little dose of nihilism can make you a better person.’” He laughs, clarifying: “We’re actually, like, very sweet, hopeful, romantic people.”

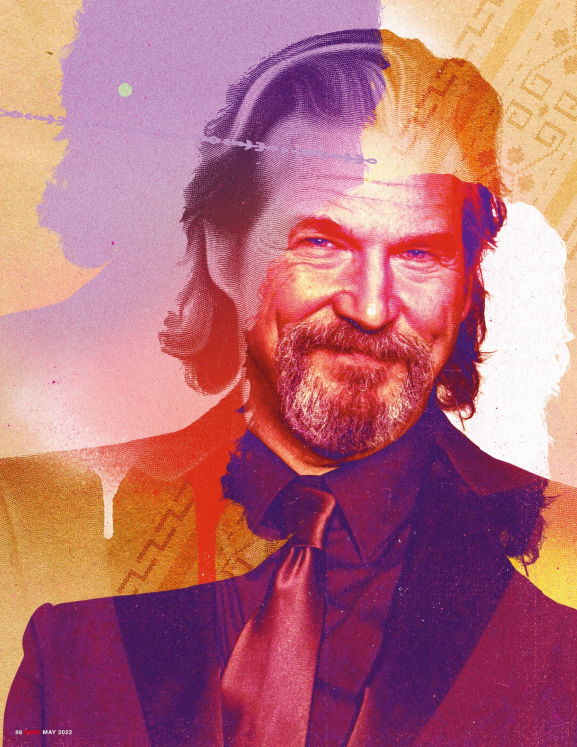
If, as it indeed turns out, nothing matters, Daniels seem keen to meet that meaninglessness with absurdity and empathy. If we are, in fact, specks of nothing in an indifferent universe, we might as well be kind to each other—and chuck in some dildos, for a laugh. “The delineation between highbrow and lowbrow, the profound and the profane, the beautiful and the disgusting... Our work is always trying to encapsulate that in a way that feels beautiful and thought-provoking,” says Kwan.

It has left Michelle Yeoh more introspective than she ever expected a film which had her wearing hot-dog fingers could make her. “The philosophy in this chaotic thing!” she says. “The strength of this story is the will to not give in. We have to live in the now. There may be multiverses out there, but we are not out there. We are here. And we have to love it.” And with that, the Zoom call cuts out again. ●

**EVERYTHING EVERYWHERE ALL AT ONCE IS IN CINEMAS NOW**

Clockwise from top left: Directors Daniel Kwan and Daniel Scheinert—aka Daniels; Evelyn with husband Waymond, played by Ke Huy Quan; Brook-no-argument Evelyn Joy (Stephanie Hsu) in her Elvis guitar; Things deteriorate further for Evelyn and Deirdre in this particular multiverse; Alpha Waymond with a tech assistant—we know how you feel...; A dapper Waymond variant.









# GODS AMONG US

In our regular series, we pay tribute  
to the towering, mega-watt stars  
who still roam Hollywood

## The dedicated zen wizard who makes effortlessness look easy **JEFF BRIDGES**

WESOLOIAN/MAHMAN LEFT: PHOTOFEST/CHRISTOPHER LEE/LEWIS

THE LEBOWSKI FEST of 2005 was in full swing. Quite frankly, those lucky enough to be crammed into the Knitting Factory Club on Hollywood Boulevard, worshippers at the altar of screwball noir *The Big Lebowski*, were nearing a state of delirium when the headline act was finally introduced. It had been announced that he was coming, but still no-one could quite believe it. But here it was, the miracle: "Ladies and gentlemen, please welcome to the stage, JEFF BRIDGES!"

As the laconic actor strolled into his very first Lebowski Fest, those trademark locks cascading to his shoulders, jellies clamped to his feet, a smile as familiar as sunlight, his backing band, The Abiders (natch), strumming the opening bars to Bob Dylan's "The Man In Me", the effect leaned more towards Charlie Kaufman than Coen brother.

"It was my Beatles moment," marvelled Bridges to Matthew McConaughey during a Variety event in 2016, recalling a sea of Dudes in front of him. Grown men wept into their White

Russians, dabbing runny noses on towelling sleeves. As he surveyed the sweaty crowd, he registered Walters, Donny's, Maudes, nihilists, bowling pins, and, if his eyes did not deceive him, one enterprising soul had come as Jackie Treehorn's obscene doodle.

Let's put a pin in the historical record right here. This is the nonpareil moment of Bridges' elevation to most beloved star in Hollywood. If Jesus had strolled onto that stage, the decibel level would have scored a distant second. And there were a fair few Jessuses among the crowd too, dressed in embroidered purple jumpsuits and hair nets. Later, backstage, Bridges looked happy but bewildered. "I just think it's a weird dream I'm having, man," he gasped to a fan — the moment caught on phone and preserved on YouTube. He could have been talking about his whole career.

Here's what is obvious. In later life, Bridges abides. He is a genuine icon, a national treasure, an actor who has risen above the fray. He is



## THE BOX OFFICE

Jeff Bridges' top five money-makers

### IRON MAN

\$585 million

### KINGSMAN: THE GOLDEN CIRCLE

\$411 million

### TRON: LEGACY

\$400 million

### TRUE GRIT

\$252 million

### SURF'S UP

\$152 million

\* Global box office, according to BoxOfficeMojo.com



the Zen superstar. Only Meryl Streep is on the same level, beyond reproach.

Is he at peace with the fact that The Dude may well be his epitaph, the talk-show hosts always ask? "Of course," he beamed to Conan O'Brien in 2016, stroking the lustrous, white beard as vital to the overall effect as on Santa Claus. "It's a masterpiece, man." He knows that everywhere he goes, he takes The Dude with him. Actor and signature role have become almost indivisible. They share the same first name, the same amiable nature, the same need to please.

Here's what is less obvious. The Dude distorts the picture. It is too simple to view Bridges' 50-plus-year career through the prism of his current status as Hollywood's favourite uncle. In fact, his career makes little sense. The hits are fewer than you might think (even The Dude came out of the creative womb trussed up like a turkey). He has thrived on the margins. The heavenly looks don't fit the twitchy body language. It's hard to get a fix on him. Why is Bridges a superstar? He doesn't add up to one. Historian David Thomson likens him to Robert Mitchum in his *New Biographical Dictionary Of Film*, which gives you pause. Mitchum, really? It's the lack of self-importance and innate

scepticism toward his chosen craft. Indeed, during an indeterminate 1980s, Bridges took the Mitchum part in Taylor Hackford's remake of *Out Of The Past*, the oil-slick-smooth *Against All Odds*.

Bridges has doubted every role he's taken. Even The Dude. "You've got to try and drag me to the party," he confessed to the *Independent* in 2018. And it is that uncertainty that gives him authenticity. We mistake his grace for calm. He's barely stopped working since his career began in earnest in 1971, changing with the decade, never fully at home in any era. Beneath the still surface, his legs are churning the water.

Few are as dedicated to their craft. It takes an incredible amount of research and application to look as if he's rolled out of bed and onto set. "It takes an effort to be effortless," he grinned to McConaughey in their *Variety* summit.

But after all that work, all that doubt, he said, just before the first take, he clears his mind and lets the Zen flood in.

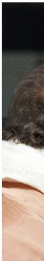


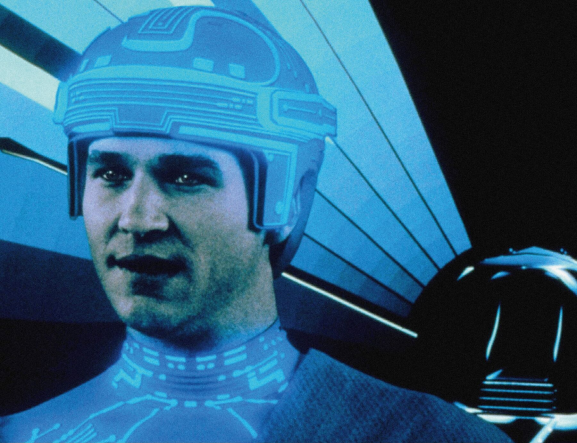
JEFFREY LEON BRIDGES was never sure he wanted to act. You can blame Peter Bogdanovich and Tennessee Williams and Clint Eastwood,

and, of course, his old man.

In that Hollywood way, it was preordained that he would follow in his father's footsteps; he was only six months old when he made his debut as Jane Greer's baby in *The Company She Keeps*. Jeff was the third son of Lloyd Bridges, an effervescent, fast-talking journeyman who had appeared in *High Noon* and *A Walk In The Sun*, and later as the glue-sniffing air-traffic wunk in *Airplane!* Lloyd liked work to be a family affair. Jeff and older brother Beau featured in episodes of his smash television series *Sea Hunt* as easily as sitting down to dinner. Instead of bedtime stories, Jeff got advice on the finer points of acting — don't wait to say your lines, listen to what is being said to you. His much-loved mother, Dorothy Bridges, was also an actor, and it was a tight family unit at the centre of things, with a home in the Holmby Hills, adjacent to the Los Angeles Country Club.

From childhood, Bridges had been pathologically indecisive. "My mom calls it abulia," he told *The Hollywood Reporter* in 2011. "Isn't that a good word, abulia? They say it's a mental illness for people who can't make up their mind." Like any teen, he yearned to find his own path. Maybe he could be a painter or a musician.





**Clockwise from**

**top left:** As thief Jake Busey in 1972 Western *Bad Company*; rocking the furore blue in the iconic *Tron* (1982); In John Huston's boxing drama *Fat City* (1972); Breaking out alongside Cybill Shepherd in Peter Bogdanovich's highly acclaimed *The Last Picture Show* (1971) — for which he scored his first Oscar nomination.

Military Academy gave way to a stint in the Coast Guard, but he kept up acting classes at the Herbert Berghof Studio in New York. Acting was (still is) a way of settling his pinballing thoughts — of bringing the world into focus.

The breakthrough came the old-fashioned way. His agent sent him along to an audition. Critic-turned-director Bogdanovich was adapting Larry McMurtry's bustling tale of small-town Texan life, *The Last Picture Show*, and was set on fresh faces. Duane Jackson was a perfect fit for a 19-year-old Bridges: he's the town beau, a football star, dating Cybill Shepherd's Jaci, but dissatisfaction will drive him to enlist for Korea. Bogdanovich knew it as soon as Bridges walked through the door. He was so damn likeable. Duane was colder on the page, explained Bogdanovich in *The Last Picture Show: A Look Back*: "I knew that Jeff would give him additional warmth." "Additional warmth" might as well be on his résumé. The Academy was charmed into giving him his first Oscar nomination.

It was some start. Then, after John Huston's boxing drama *Fat City* and Robert Benton's excellent tale of Civil War draft-dodgers, *Bad Company*, came John Frankenheimer's *The*



*The Iconman Cometh.* Talked into it, Bridges found himself inspired. It was the first time he considered himself an actor. Playing tragic, goofy sidekick to a peak Eastwood in the delightful heist comedy *Thunderbolt And Lightfoot* sealed the deal, with debutant director Michael Cimino portraying him as a deranged angel. Bridges had a ball, even if Eastwood groused over how the film turned out. He knew the kid was stealing the show. Bridges landed another Oscar nomination — his second in three years. For all the doubts, all the abulia, it really did look effortless, as if he could conjure up a character out of pure charisma.



BRIDGES HAS NEVER assembled a career according to the rules. Or taken stock of his place among the vagaries of Hollywood fashion. The agents tried their damndest, but he simply worked on instinct. Nevertheless, the poster boy for '70s non-conformism faced an '80s where it was all about the franchise and the halo of special effects.

To be fair, Bridges had checked the flow

of his mystique midway through the previous decade by sharing the screen with a 55-foot mechanical gorilla (hell, Kong has nothing on Walter Sobchak) — or as it turned out, in a fraught production, mostly make-up man Rick Baker in an ape suit. Bringing *King Kong* up to date looked like a winner. Bridges as the tanned paleontologist, Jessica Lange in the Fay Wray role, a modern-day vibe, and despite appearances it made money.

The film is a laughing stock these days, but Bridges has no regrets: two months in Hawaii, hanging out with Lange, watching a giant furry hand break down... "I did *Kong* not because this could really be good for my career but because I used to ditch school, pretend I was sick, so I could watch the original on TV," he told *The Hollywood Reporter* in 2011. "It was like a child thing, very similar to why I did *Tron*. There's a kid in me that's still alive, and it bubbles up that way."

If *King Kong* remade the past, the new-fangled *Tron* was ahead of its time. Here was a film set inside a computer game, and more like a dream than a shoot. They were kitted out in leotards and hockey helmets, with the



**Clockwise from above:** The Duelist Bridges in 'the Coons' *The Big Lebowski* (1996); Alongside Glenn Close in 1985's *Jagged Edge*; With brother Beau and Michelle Pfeiffer in *The Fabulous Baker Boys* (1989); Alongside Karen Allen in *Storman* (1984) — Oscar nomination #3 would follow; With Robin Williams in 1991's *The Fisher King*.





soundstages enshrouded in monochrome. In its whirl of light cycles and disc battles, another cult was born. And somehow, Bridges looked right at home.

Truthfully, he had the wrong rhythm to be an action hero. He looked the part, but never felt the part. His delivery remains a riddle of hems and haws and sudden verbal flourishes, at once rambling and manic. He doesn't seem to be concentrating.

It speaks volumes about the crazy paving of Bridges' career that between his special-effect extravaganzas, he made the greatest flop of all time. Cimino returned with the part of the naïf, top-hatted entrepreneur who builds the titular rink in *Heaven's Gate*, a swooning Western centred on the Johnson County War of 1889-'93. It's a genre that suits Bridges' odd syncopations and versatile hair. So he did his long months in Montana, captive to Cimino's furtive muse as *Heaven's Gate* swelled into monomaniacal indulgence.

According to distinguished musician T Bone Burnett, 1984 space oddity *Starman* is key to understanding his friend. "A lot of people think *The Dude* is Jeff," he told *The Hollywood Reporter* in 2011, "but the character in *Starman* is closest, because he seems to look at everything from outer space." In John Carpenter's sci-fi romance, Bridges is essentially a dishy E.T.: an alien clothed in human skin, the identikit body of Karen Allen's recently deceased husband. The film plays a little goofy, but there is still something startlingly daring about Bridges' jerky mannerisms and angular line-readings; you can almost picture the alien pressing at his skin from beneath. It's a tour de force that earned another Oscar nomination.

QED: Bridges was more starman than star. He soared in roles that channelled his uncertainty. Raw as the wronged man in neo-noir *Cutter's Way*, cunningly beautiful in courtroom thriller *Jagged Edge*. His lead performance in Francis Ford Coppola's excellent *Tucker: The Man And His Dream*, the late-1940s tale of a failed American dreamer, is another deviant one, suggesting charisma can be a form of madness, with Bridges well aware he was channelling Coppola as much as the mercurial Tucker. And something of himself too.



BY THE 1990s Bridges was impossible to pin down. He cultivated studios in strangeness, drawn to lost souls and unconventional directors. A troubled shock-jock in *The Fisher King*, taut as a drum-skin as the burdened ex-con in *American Heart*, horrifyingly plausible as a serial killer in *The Vanishing*.

Life poured into art in *The Fabulous Baker Boys*, in which he and Beau played a pair of ivory-tinkling brothers riven by the arrival of Michelle Pfeiffer's stop-the-traffic-gorgeous crooner Susie Diamond. Jeff's Jack Baker has the better looks, the easy charm, and the greater talent; Beau's Frank is bitter and more driven.



## THE MOMENT

### Duane attacks Sonny

The Last Picture Show (1971)



Peter Bogdanovich's melancholic coming-of-age classic *The Last Picture Show* closely observes the lives of a Texan community bound by profound ennui. And among the film's many richly developed characters is

Duane (Bridges), a strapping teen and promising athlete who's dating the hottest girl in town, Jacy (Cybil Shepherd). Bridges' moving portrayal of a young man struggling with impotence and disillusionment is a unique balance of brooding melancholy and electrifying charisma. His standout moment comes in the film's most explosive scene: having left town after Jacy dumped him, Duane returns months later to discover his best friend Sonny (Timothy Bottoms) has started seeing her since he's been away. Feeling betrayed, Duane goes to confront him, and a dig at his bedroom struggles sends Duane over the edge. He violently smashes a bottle into Sonny's face, leaving him bloodied and near-blind. Duane's total lack of self-awareness throughout this confrontation — and Bridges' effortless keying into the character's child-like impulsivity and heartfelt pain — turn a scene that could have easily felt soap-opera-esque

into a visceral evocation of innocence shattered. Critic Pauline Kael once suggested Bridges may be the most natural actor to have ever lived. His astonishingly mature turn here is still our most potent reminder why.





The film is one of the great studies of entertainment's lonely fringes.

Then came Peter Weir's sublime *Fearless*. In terms of pure performance, Bridges' portrayal of a man who walks from an air crash convinced he is unbreakable is the apotheosis of his unique gifts. It's an astonishing, unnerving trajectory. He took persuading, but as Weir explained to *MovieLine* in 1993, with Bridges there were "sparks that were way above simply good craft". He was in touch with unknowable frequencies.

Cometh Lebowsky. So dominant is the Venice Beach hippy on the American cultural landscape ("Dudeism" has 600,000 registered members) that Bridges' career can be divided into before *The Dude* and after *The Dude*, or if you are into the whole beevy thing: BD and AD. Like Weir, the Coens only ever wanted Bridges. It is a monument to the actor's versatility that he came to *The Dude* having played Wild Bill Hickock with brutish power and a glorious moustache in Walter Hill's flawed *Wild Bill*, then the sun-polished captain in Ridley Scott's sailing tragedy *White Squall*, and Barbra Streisand's love interest in *The Mirror Has Two Faces*.

Were they really so alike, man and Dude? Bridges confessed there were periods in his life when he enjoyed a joint or two, a drink, and the freedom of surf shorts. "When I read the script," he laughed to McConaughey during that 2016 *Variety* gabble, "I wondered if they had been stalking me." That script was a marvel, the

character fragrant, the directors as delightfully off-beam and wackily coiffured as their hero. Yet he dallied.

"I was concerned about taking that part because it was sort of romancing a stoner, a pothead," he admitted on *Conan* in 2016. What would his daughters think? So he asked, and Jessie, his youngest, put him straight. "Dad, you are an actor, it's just pretending." Well, near enough.

Here's the thing. Watch *The Big Lebowski* again — it remains a constant delight, a bona-fide American classic as quotable as *Casablanca* (though with marginally more F-bombs). You're remembering it wrong. Far from a warm, karmic fug, inveterate bum, regular bowler and haphazard gumshoe Jeffrey "The Dude" Lebowski spends the majority of the film in a state of extreme agitation. This is partly down to the twists of the Coens' motley rejig of Raymond Chandler, but mostly the result of taking advice from BFF, ersatz-wife and hair-trigger nutball Walter Sobchak (John Goodman, creating an equal and opposite to Bridge's ruffled poise — sanguine psychosis). It's a peerless double act, and a thing of wonder. Truly, a beautiful friendship. *Hear* with drop-outs.

The Dude abides in the company of Rick Blaine, Atticus Finch, Peter Venkman et al, as one of the great American characters. And Bridges climbed mountains to achieve such lo-fi splendour: the staccato delivery, the synthesis







**Left:** In the Coens' Western remake *True Grit* (2010) — time for Oscar nomination (6). **Right, top to bottom:** In 2011's cult neo-noir *Bad Times At The El Royale*; As Texas Ranger Marcus Hamilton in *Hell Or High Water* (2016). **Below:** Returning to the world of *Tron* in 2011's sequel *Tron: Legacy*. **Bottom:** Making his Marvel mark in 2008's *Iron Man*.



Mattie Ross (an imperious Hailee Steinfeld) into the fable-like frontier. Why remake a John Wayne movie, he asked? They weren't, they implored: this was a new version of the book. Reading Charles Portis' novel, he understood — it was about the language, that particular cadence. Rooster is Bridges in his pomp, chewing his lines like tobacco.

He also returned to the interior world of *True* with *Tron: Legacy* and the trip of playing opposite his younger self. Trapped within an evolving game universe, his older self, Kevin Flynn, is a symbolic take on late Bridgesness: you know, cooled on Buddhist waves in his digital pad, Kubrickian floor-lighting really tying the room together, occasional acid flashback. Bridges even brought his personal Zen master — fellow called Bernie Glasman, huge Lebowksi fan — on as script advisor. "Well, one of my concerns about getting into this movie was that it wouldn't just be a special-effects movie," he explained to *CineBlend* in 2010. "That it would have some helpful mythology to it."

So it's another curio for a blockbuster. His young, brash, digital copy, CLU, was modelled on his look in *Against All Odds*, and light cycles apart, the film serves as a commentary on the evolution of Bridges within the alt-universe of Hollywood. Meanwhile, in the compelling neo-Western *Hell Or High Water*, he span all that adoration on its head to play the villainous old sheriff and we only loved him more, basking in his gruff humour, an ease you know took dedication. Then, he brought a soulfulness to the cloth as Father Daniel Flynn in neo-noir jukebox *Bad Times At The El Royale*, and we eagerly await *The Old Man*, an espionage series about former CIA agent Dan Chase, who has gone to ground with his secrets.

Amid the outpouring of concern and fondness that followed Bridges' diagnosis of lymphoma in 2020, and the successful treatment diarised on social media like his latest role, no-one dared offer any kind of retrospective. A universe without Bridges is unthinkable. He must abide. We cling to that like a life raft in troubled waters. In beautiful, haunting, joyous, paradoxical waves of hyperactive Zen, he has shown us what it is to be human. Now let's bow. ●



## MIA

The Bridges roles that never were



### TAXI DRIVER

"We could have financed the film with Jeff Bridges," said Paul Schrader of the screenplay he wrote with him in mind. He and Martin Scorsese soon, though, pivoted to *De Niro*.



### BIG

Bridges could have been the 12-year-old boy who prematurely becomes a man. "I met with [director] Penny Marshall and that's one that I knew would be a hit," he remembered. "For some reason that part just didn't fit me."



### THE LAST TEMPTATION OF CHRIST

Bridges wanted to play Jesus so much, he wrote to Scorsese. "I don't remember his response," he later recalled. "When Harvey Keitel got the role, that was my answer."



### TOTAL RECALL

Originally, Doug Quaid was to be played by Bridges, despite Arnold Schwarzenegger lobbying to play him. Original producer Dino De Laurentiis didn't think he was right for it; Arnie went to Mars regardless. ALEX GODFREY

of line and body language, words trailing into gestures — the entire symphony of Dudeness required a musicality. He knew every beat, every pause, every shrug. He and his directors were as one. As related in Ronald Bergan's book *The Coen Brothers*, he only ever had a single question for either Joel or Ethan, depending on who was closest: had he "burned one" on the way over? If the answer came in the affirmative, he would furiously rub his eyes before the take. That's art, man.



AD, THE AFFECTION for Bridges runs as full as a river across his Montana ranch. As long as Bridges is about, then this business can't be all bad. Ever curious, he even tried his hand at a Marvel movie, starring as the villain Obadiah Stane in 2008's *Iron Man*. Talking to *GQ* in 2018, he recalled furiously rewriting the script with "Downey and Favreau" in their trailers, fretting where all this was going, before the Zen descended.

With nothing to prove, he is still proving something to himself. The slovenly Dude conferred a new authority on Bridges. He gained his fourth Oscar nomination as the droll President in *The Contender*, and on his fifth attempt the Oscar arrived with the insistence of gravity. The man was due. Naturally, he fought *Crazy Heart* all the way. The story of a country-and-Western star undone by alcohol had been

# VIEW

! SPOILER WARNING

INDISPENSABLE HOME ENTERTAINMENT [EDITED BY CHRIS HEWITT]

## Second life

Oscar-winning filmmaker Chloé Zhao reflects on the divisive impact and evolving reputation of her ambitious Marvel epic, **ETERNALS**

A MARVEL MOVIE from Oscar-winning indie auteur Chloé Zhao was never going to be your typical MCU fare. But *Eternals* — arriving mere months after her awards-sweeping *Nomadland* — proved especially polarising, with its existentially troubled cosmic heroes, multi-millennia-spanning timeline, and a surprise cameo from a certain pop megastar. Marvel die-hards and critics alike were befuddled. But as *Eternals* hit Disney+, its reputation began shifting, audiences discovering more on every rewatch. Zhao sat down with *Empire* to talk the film's polarising reception, emotional complexities, and evolving destiny.

2021 was a huge year for you — it began with *Nomadland*'s Oscar wins, and ended with *Eternals*. How are you reflecting on it all now?

Wow. If you put it like that, how lucky am I? I'm very, very grateful for how many people around the world took their time to see my work. And I absolutely loved the team behind both films. So beyond that, I am lucky to love the people I work with.

**Were you able to enjoy the Oscar success at the time, and let those wins sink in?**

I went to bed at 2:30 that morning, and I went back to the Marvel office, I think, at 8 [laughs]. So the answer is... no. But I'm not really the type that celebrates too much anyway, so it suits me just fine to go back to work.

**What did it mean for you to be able to make a huge genre film like *Eternals* — a massively ambitious, comic-book fantasy blockbuster**







Here: Gemma Chan as Primo Eternal Sersi, on the run as crew-members get the shot. Below: Director Chloé Zhao and Angelina Jolie (playing elite warrior Thana) chat on set.



with your fingerprints all over it, that made \$400 million during a pandemic?

Having had some space to reflect on it, it's just spectacular for me. We were not really thinking about that. We really were pouring our hearts [out] and [taking] the risk we'd like to take. There was very little conversation, next to none, about how that's going to affect the box office, how that's going to affect how we are perceived, for me as an individual, for Marvel as a company. We just wanted to do what we thought was the right thing. And then still to be embraced by audiences around the world at a time like this, and now when it's on Disney+, it makes me have a lot of faith in audiences — what they're looking for, what they're capable of, of their ability to be challenged.

**It is a challenging film. This was the first of your films to get more critical pushback. Did you read the reviews when they first came out? How did you feel about that initial wave of reactions?**

Really? Oh my God. This is the first time I'm hearing about this. [Laughs] Can you imagine if I literally lived in a cave, and you just broke the news to me?

**I'm sorry, Chloe!**

That would be horrible, wouldn't it! I think the need for consensus is a hindrance for any authentic creative process. Just like it's a hindrance for living an authentic life as a person. I have been on the receiving end of somewhat consensus, and divisiveness about my work. Neither of them has any real influence on me

as an artist, because every time I'm lucky enough to create, I learn from the process. From what I've succeeded [at], and what I've failed [at]. But that learning process is a very intimate affair. Anything beyond that, for me, it's just a part of the ecosystem that exists because of the nature of the industry we're in. Like a flower or a rock, I acknowledge and appreciate their presence. But that's as far as it goes.

**Did you expect *Eternals* to be as divisive as it was?**

There are things in the film you know [will] raise some eyebrows. It's just common sense, right? Every time I make a film, I always want to challenge my audience. I want to push how far genre can go, and the medium of cinema. I never want to feel stagnant. And every time, it feels like it could have been a divisive response. As an artist, we don't have control once our baby goes into the world, the timing and the world we're in. *Eternals* was planned to be released soon after *Endgame*, and not at a time when everyone is having an existential crisis. The film itself also has existential crisis, both for humanity and God. So I think we definitely felt it was coming.

**On a second viewing, *Eternals* changes a lot — so much pivots on the Ikaris reveal. Did you always intend it as a film that might grow and evolve in people's minds over time?**

Yeah. With every film I've made, there's a surface level of what you see. There's a plot, a genre, and a quite simple story. It's complicated. *Eternals*, but if you think about it — get the band back together, save the world — there is that. Action, humour. And then underneath, you could say there's a family drama, there's romance, you can find universal themes. But [in] every film I've made, I hope that there is something beyond the universal themes, something that allows audiences to just be a little uncomfortable. It forces them to, if they would like to, have self-reflection after seeing the film. That is something they might not even want to discuss with other people. What really drew me to this story is, Sersi and every other Eternal, and especially Ikaris, really have this existential crisis. Before, the essence of their life had meaning because it was given by the great power of the Celestials. And when they realise, "Wait a minute, actually, the meaning of my life is something that I have to choose, and act on," it's like how someone wakes up one day and stops believing in God. Or in our government, or our family, who we are. And I think that layer of this film could be actually quite uncomfortable

Top to bottom: Zhao directs Don Lee (Deviant-renamee Gligens); Community builder Phastos (Brian Tyree Henry); Richard Madden's troubled Ikaris; The wise Aps (Salma Hayek); Super-speedy Makkari (Lauren Ridloff) and Thena; Sersi and Eternal child Sprite (Li Mhuirigh)



Madden, Chen and some members in the middle of some serious blue screen. Below: Barry Keoghan — who plays mind-controller Makkari — in deep conversation with Ridloff.



to watch, as you're going through a huge change in our perception of our world, because of the pandemic.

**How did you work with Richard Madden on his performance? It plays so differently on repeat viewings — knowing what he's holding in, what he *isn't* doing as much as what he is doing.**

I love to discover things that [actors] naturally carry, and then apply that to the character. Ikaris has the weight of the world on his shoulders — and universe, in this case — and I see that in Richard a little bit. There's a way he holds himself, there's tension in his body. So much is what's not said, and what's not released. The tenseness of his posture, a soldier that has this great secret that has to be released in the end. That was one of the main things we talked about.

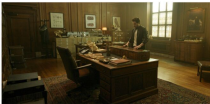
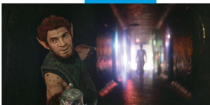


**Below, top to bottom:** Patti Colson as former prince Pip the Tusk, who mutated after too much axe. Think on, kids: From throwing to an office chair — Kil Harrington as Black Knight. Dore Whitman.

It hits hard when he finally does release that tension — the agony he's in, him flying into the sun.

We shot that scene on the last day. It was the beginning of the pandemic, December 2019. It had just started, there's a whisper in the air, there's nervousness. We were wrapping this really long, intense shoot. So I think there was release in everyone in that moment. It was a very emotional day. Sometimes people see it just as, "Oh, he's made a mistake, he betrayed the love of his life, he betrayed his family, betrayed his God." I'll go beyond [that] to say, the most painful thing that we can realize is, "Oh shit, I've always had the choice." That's one of the deepest fears I myself have, as I think a lot of people do. Seeing him going into the sun is not the most comfortable ending for a superhero [laughs]. But, you know, one to think about.

**How does it feel that people are revisiting and rediscovering the film now on Disney+?** I always wanted people to watch the film in the theatres, especially how this one was visually conceived. But in retrospect, maybe being in the comfort of your home instead of in a mask in a theatre with strangers allows people a level of vulnerability and comfort. So [when] they watch your film about existential crisis,



they could take it in a little more. And take bathroom breaks!

People seemed to attribute the character work and the look of the film to you, because it's similar to your dramatic work, and then ascribe the comic-book, genre stuff to the 'Marvel process' — but that's clearly not the case. How do you feel about those assumptions?

When people have that feeling, like they need to put order into things, they need to understand it by putting it into boxes. It is not about us, it is about them. And I say that lovingly, because they have a level of comfort [with] how their

entertainment and their world — their beloved Marvel, or their beloved indie filmmaker — functions. That's the order of the logic of their world that's being disturbed. So I appreciate their passion, to try to make sense of it. The truth is that nobody is one layer. In this case, we truly stepped out of the box that I think the world put us in, and met in the middle because of our shared interests. And by truly doing that, it made a lot of people uncomfortable on both sides. But there are also people who are more comfortable with the order of their world [being] disturbed. And then they look at our love-child and go, "Oh! This touches different sides of me!" I like that. So I completely understand the divisiveness coming from critics and the fans. Because when you take this to extremes that are seen as opposition — the world I come from and the world of Marvel, that has been divided in a way that's so unfair and unfortunate — and to merge the way we did, I actually see the reaction as a testament to how much we had merged with each other; how uncomfortable that might make people feel.

**The opening of Eternals is very Star Wars — you have an opening crawl, and a ship**

**flying past the sun. Is that a world you've considered playing in?**

No comment.

**Okay!**

But, who doesn't love Star Wars? Come on. It's also in the same situation as Marvel. It's seen by a big group of people for what it was — myself included, I'm a die-hard, old-school fan of Star Wars, quite conservative actually — and then you see [it] also evolving into the future. Any kind of evolution, any kind of change, is painful. It's like seeing an insect [transform from] a caterpillar. Marvel is changing, and it's painful, and Star Wars is changing. I love being part of that change, and finding my footing. Hopefully I can land safely every time, but you never know. It's the process that matters, and the people you work with.

**Casting Harry Styles as Eros was your idea. Do you know where he goes next? Will you be the person telling that story?**

I have no comment to that! But as a fan, one of the joys is to be able to sit back and see how the seeds you plant can grow. And I've planted a lot of seeds with this film. I look forward to the next ten years to see what kind of fascinating and brilliant and strange shape of plants are going to come out of those seeds. **BEN TRAVIS**

**ETERNALS IS OUT NOW ON DVD, Blu-ray, 4K, Disney+ AND DIGITAL.**

The incongruity so enjoyed by the Coens: Bernie Buntoun (John Turturro) cowers before Tom Reagan (Gabriel Byrne) in an idyllic setting.

## THE MASTERPIECE

We reassess the greatest films of all time, one film at a time

# Miller's Crossing

AT THE START of production for *Miller's Crossing* in January 1989, cinematographer Barry Sonnenfeld asked writer-directors Joel and Ethan Coen an obvious but necessary question: how did they want the film to look? "It should be a handsome movie," Ethan told him, distinguishing it instantly from the madcap, camera-whirling antics of the trio's previous

collaboration, *Raising Arizona*. "A handsome movie about men in hats."

The Coens had long been fans of the gangster genre, one well-known for its wealth of hat-wearing men. They particularly enjoyed the way it was explored by novelist Dashiell Hammett, whose *Red Harvest* and *The Glass Key* were the main inspirations for *Miller's Crossing*. "He took the genre and used it to tell a story that was interesting about people and other things besides just the plot," said Joel in 1990. "In Hammett, the plot is like a big jigsaw puzzle that can be seen in the background. It may make some internal sense, but the momentum of the characters is more important."

However, notwithstanding the film's debts to Hammett, Joel and Ethan's overriding creative concern was to make something *different*. Not just from their previous two pictures (it was "a conscious effort not to repeat ourselves") but also from what people expected of the genre. Before the co-screenwriting brothers became embroiled in their own big-jigsaw puzzle — so complicated by double-crosses and love-triangles they were stricken with writer's block and paused to come up with another script (*Barton Fink*, a movie about writer's block) — *Miller's Crossing* originated with a simple, striking image in their

shared mind's eye: big guys wearing long overcoats and broad-brimmed hats, out in the woods. This appealed to the siblings because they dug "the incongruity of urban gangsters in a forest setting".

This blend of appreciation for the genre's iconography and an urge for incongruity is what marks *Miller's Crossing* out from any other gangster film, including those that piled up in the same year it was released, including *Dick Tracy*, *The Godfather Part III* and *GoodFellas*. Set in an unnamed city during Prohibition and focused on an Irish-versus-Italian Mob war, it does not stint on speakeasy-busts, bloody beefs and Tommy-gun action. Yet it is an incredibly talky film, with impressively verbose characters whose dialogue is so spiced by period argot (partly genuine, partly fabricated) that foreign distributors were given a Coen-penned glossary for the subtitle-writers.

It is also, despite consciously not being an "out-and-out comedy", as Joel put it, funnier than most out-and-out comedies. Take the scene where Irish Mob consigliere Tom Reagan (Gabriel Byrne) suddenly bashes gigantic goon Frankie (Mike Starr) with a chair, causing him to stomp off like a hurt child and send in the far more dangerous little, old guy Tic-Tac (Al Mancini) to work Tom over. Or the hysterical non-sequitur where a tense meeting is interrupted by the



Top: A more traditional gangster trope as the power struggle intensifies.  
Bottom: Tom with the no-nonsense Verna (Marcia Gay Harden).

excited child of Italian boss Johnny Caspar (Jon Polito) shrilly, repeatedly shouting, "Poppa, poppa, I got a prize from the sisters!", until his dad slaps him, then comforts the wailing boy, saying "What's a matter, somebody hit you?" Then there is the moment during the astonishing "Danny Boy" sequence, in which Tom's boss Leo (Albert Finney, simultaneously lovable and fearsome) turns the tables on a group of Tommy-gun-wielding assassins to the strains of Frederic Weatherly's beloved ballad. Leo shoots up one assailant so viciously, they become a bullet-ridden puppet, improbably blasting the walls, a chandelier and their own toes in an ultraviolently slapstick manner. "It's about time at that point to shed a little blood," Ethan deadpanned to *Premiere* magazine. "The movie's in danger of becoming tasteless, you know?"

Yet, for all the Coens' mischievous tendencies, *Miller's Crossing* is thoroughly tasteful. Sublime, even. That forest setting mentioned by Joel is the fictional hinterland which gives the film its title (far better than the working name of "The Bighead"); a beautifully, forebodingly overcast woodland visited four times during the story, beginning with the opening credits sequence, likely a dream, where a black fedora is blown along the forest floor. The hat is at the mercy of elemental forces, snatched and dropped by an uncaring breeze, though it also seems to swirl purposefully, as if it somehow knows where it's heading. You could say this foreshadows the journey of its supposed owner, Tom, who is buffeted from beating to brutal beating, while playing his own side off against the gang of upstart Caspar in a manner that can either be seen as the machinations of a hoodlum Machiavelli, or the wily luck of a quick-witted opportunist. (Our money's on the latter.)

Tom himself will return to these woods for

the film's signature scene, to hold a gun to the head of troublesome bookie Bernie Bernbaum (John Turturro), who's been sneakily selling tips on Caspar's fixed-fight bets, before heeding Bernie's desperate plea to look into his heart and spare him. He'll come back again to narrowly avoid execution himself at the hands of Caspar enforcer the Dane (a deliciously menacing J.E. Freeman), and finally to attend a funeral, where he will lose — and/or reject — both his friendship with Leo and the love of Bernie's take-no-shit sister, Verna (Marcia Gay Harden).

How much of a tragedy this is depends on how you read Tom's motives; does he have a heart? The Coens give the character plenty of Hammettian momentum, but while they often show him chewing things over, they never give us a taste. Their disregard for insight and interpretation is echoed in Tom's own dismissal of Verna's pillow-talk attempt to decipher his hat-blowing-in-the-woods dream. He never ran after the hat. It never symbolised anything. "Nothing more foolish than a man chasing his hat," Tom growls.

That shouldn't stop us from drawing our own conclusions. And if it takes us several viewings to make our minds up, we're only richer for the experience, whether we're untangling the strands of the plot, marvelling at the articulate rhythm and flow of the dialogue, or just appreciating the whole sheer, damn artistry of everyone involved. Not just Joel and Ethan, but also the cast, production designer Dennis Gassner, who made late-'80s New Orleans pass for a late-'20s Eastern US city, and Sonnenfeld, whose stately, wide-angle-lens work surpassed anything he'd done before or since. It is impossible to imagine how the movie could be more handsome. Or, for that matter, more men-in-hat. **DAN JOLIN**

*MILLER'S CROSSING* IS OUT NOW ON DVD, BLU-RAY AND DIGITAL

## THE COENS IN NUMBERS



29/11/54

JOEL COEN IS BORN

21/9/57

ETHAN COEN IS BORN

**3** NUMBER OF TIMES JOEL HAS WON BEST DIRECTOR AT CANNES, (MORE THAN ANYONE ELSE)

1981

Joel's first credit, as assistant editor on *Fear No Evil* and *The Evil Dead*

1984

Ethan's first feature film credit, as producer and writer of *Blood Simple*



**16**

THE NUMBER OF OSCAR NOMINATIONS THEY HAVE RECEIVED

**6**

THE NUMBER OF MOVIES THEY HAVE WRITTEN (JOEL WRITING BUT RARELY DIRECTING) *CRIMEWAVE*, *THE NAKED MAN*, *GAMBIT*, *UNBROKEN*, *BRIDGE OF SPIES*, *SUBURBICOM*

**\$252 MILLION**

THE WORLDWIDE GROSS OF THE COENS' BIGGEST MOVIE, *TRUE GRIT*

**4**

THE NUMBER OF OSCARS WON (BEST ORIGINAL SCREENPLAY FOR *FARGO*, BEST PICTURE, BEST DIRECTOR AND BEST ADAPTED SCREENPLAY FOR *NO COUNTRY FOR OLD MEN*)



# How to build a hero

Kimiwriter **DAVID KOEPP** on creating a compelling protagonist

DAVID KOEPP KNOWS a thing or two about protagonists. "You gotta give a shit about them," he says. And he should know. After all, he's created some of the most memorable and iconic heroes/anti-heroes of the last 30 years, products of a fruitful career as one of Hollywood's finest screenwriters. Here, Koepf talks us through some of his finest.

## MADELINE ASHTON DEATH BECOMES HER 1992

One of Koepf's weirdest films, the blacker-than-midnight Robert Zemeckis comedy revolves around Meryl Streep's Madeline, an actor who discovers that the secret of eternal life comes at a cost. "She was great fun to write, because she was just a terrible, terrible, selfish person," laughs Koepf. He admits that with characters like this, studios can sometimes try to sand off their rough edges. "My response always is, 'I understand that may not make him or her likeable, but it does make them interesting.'"

## CARLITO BRIGANTE CARLITO'S WAY 1993

Al Pacino's Puerto Rican gangster was adapted by Koepf from two novels by real-life judge Edwin Torres. "I normally don't want to meet the author of the book, but in this case I had to meet him, and get him to like me enough to take me around this movie," says Koepf. It was Koepf's idea to begin the movie with Carlito getting shot, narrating the events of his life as they flash through his mind. "The idea is that the whole movie takes

place in the last 60 seconds of his life. Over the course of the movie we get to like him so much, we convince ourselves he's going to make it."

## ALAN GRANT JURASSIC PARK 1993

There are three main characters in Steven Spielberg's dino-tastic classic — Alan Grant, Ellie Sattler, Ian Malcolm — but Koepf always saw Sam Neill's paleontologist as the chief protagonist. "If you go to the Michael Corleone model of character change, Grant starts the movie quite grumpy and solitary. He likes dead things better than living ones. And he has this experience and is tasked with getting two kids through the night in the jungle, and actually finds he's good at it." Life finds a way.

## ETHAN HUNT MISSION: IMPOSSIBLE 1996

Koepf was the first screenwriter to try to define the attributes of Tom Cruise's super-spy, when he wrote the Brian De Palma original in 1996. And as he looked around for what made Ethan Hunt tick, he found the answer right under his nose. "I try not to write to an actor, because if you have an actor very firmly in mind and they pass, then you can never stop thinking about who you wrote it for," he says. But Cruise was the producer on *Mission: Impossible*, and wasn't going to pass. "For me, it's hard to separate that character from the actor, because Tom has such a clear and powerful personality. There's laser-like focus, there's great strength — all that stuff is present in Tom."



## TOM WITZKY STIR OF ECHOES 1990

Another adaptation, this time of Richard Matheson's short story, yielded one of Koepf's most interesting leads, with Kevin Bacon assaying an ordinary man who finds that he can see spirits. "He was a working-class guy, which I loved, because ghost stories usually happen to upper-class or upper-middle-class people who own great big houses, because they're beautiful to shoot,"

Alamy, Getty Images



Left, top to bottom: *Kimi*; *Death Becomes Her*; *Carli's Way*; *Jurassic Park*. Above, top to bottom: *Mission: Impossible*; *Spider-Man*; *Star Of Echoes*. Below: screenwriter David Koepf.

says Koepf, who also directed the movie. "The character really takes off when Kevin gives a very touching monologue where he tells his wife he's disappointed in himself. Boy, you look into that guy right away, because who doesn't feel like that?"

#### PETER PARKER SPIDER-MAN 2002

Koepf was also the first writer to put flesh on the cinematic bones of Spider-Man, writing Tobey Maguire's Peter Parker for the Sam Raimi 2002 movie. And he found that an often-dismissed technique served him well: narration. "Voiceover is not such a bad thing if you want to create a strong central character," he says. "It's those initial strokes of who the character is that either free you to do interesting writing, or limit you. He's a teenager who feels a bit misunderstood and a bit lost. That's a great start." Koepf recently saw *Spider-Man: No Way Home*, in which Maguire returned to the role after 20 years. "I thought it was very good. Tobey's such a soulful actor. You can see in his eyes that Peter's been through some shit."

#### ANGELA CHILDS KIMI 2022

Koepf's latest is a collaboration with Steven Soderbergh, centred around Zoë Kravitz's agoraphobic tech specialist. Koepf drew inspiration from one of his favourite movies, *Sorry, Wrong Number*, in zeroing in on a female protagonist. "I wanted her to be terribly vulnerable," he explains. "The female-driven thriller is one of my favourite genres. And in Angela's case, she can be brusque and difficult, but I like that about her. I wanted to feel for her and understand her world, and how hard the world was for her to navigate." CHRIS HEWITT

KIMI IS OUT NOW ON DIGITAL AND ON CINEMA/NOW

## MARK KERMODE'S MOVIE PLAYLIST

THE CRITIC AND SCALA RADIO  
PRESENTER CHOOSES SCORES  
HE'S BEEN PLAYING ON HIS  
WEEKLY SHOW



#### ASCENSION

BY DAN DEACON

Jessica Kingdon's documentary about the pursuit of the "Chinese Dream" benefits hugely from the music of Baltimore-based composer and electro-whizz Dan Deacon. The film follows people from all walks of life — from factory workers, through the middle-classes to the wealthy elite — whom we see working at machines, painting sex dolls, training to become butlers, and learning exactly how much pressure to apply when hugging. Deacon's score (available on the Milan label) brilliantly captures the shifting tones of the film, from the playful to the perplexing. At once experimental and elegiac, it's particularly powerful when amplifying the sounds of mass production. If you enjoy this, then check out Philip Glass' legendary work on the 1982 classic *Koyaanisqatsi*, to which Kingdon's film owes a stylistic debt.

#### AMULET

BY SARAH ANGLISS

Romola Garai's chilling feature-debut as a writer/director introduced cinema-goers to a composer who is a name to watch. I first saw Sarah Angliss playing therein in an experimental show that involved robotic heads and an animatronic crow and resembled something David

Lynch would have dreamed up after one too many coffees. In December of last year, multi-instrumentalist Angliss received the Ivors Visionary Award, where she was hailed as "no ordinary musician" and "a startling and multifaceted creative technologist and composer". Her score for *Amulet* (which cries out for a bespoke CD/online release) is an eerie and unsettling treat, mixing voices with sampled renaissance instruments to startling effect. "I wanted the music in *Amulet* to match the film's own creeping sense of ambiguity," says Angliss, who took inspiration from a number of sources including Old Norse prophecy and the wails of female Scandinavian goat-herders. Really.

#### 48 HOURS

BY JAMES HORNER

James Horner's music from Walter Hill's '80s buddy-cop/action-comedy hybrid featuring Eddie Murphy and Nick Nolte was released on Intrada back in 2011 and has recently had a remastered reissue (from hi-res transfers of the original stereo mixes) alongside *Another 48 Hours*. When we played tracks from this on Scala, the listener response ranged from nostalgia to surprise. The album includes an unused version of the 'Main Title', alongside several out-takes and alternate cues, and songs by The BusBoys.

scala  
RADIO

MARK KERMODE'S FILM MUSIC SHOW IN ASSOCIATION  
WITH ESPRIMO, IS ON SCALA RADIO ON SATURDAYS  
FROM 1-3PM (SCALARADIO.CO.UK)





# THE RANKING

Five *Empire* writers.  
Ten movies.  
Ordered  
definitively.

## Nicolas Cage Movies

**Helen:** So, first memories of Nic Cage. Are we fans?

**Dan:** I have difficulty remembering because he was just always there. I would probably say *Raging Arizona*. Then maybe *Wild At Heart*. And for some reason, I remember the poster for *Zandalee*, but I've never seen it.

**Nick:** That's his erotic thriller with Judge Reinhold.

**Helen:** Are they erotic together?

**Nick:** It's an erotic love triangle.

**Helen:** I haven't seen that one.

**Nick:** It's very steamy. My first really vivid memory of Cage is going to see *Con Air* while I was at school, and we had a lot of cider. I'm pretty sure everyone involved in *Con Air* was very drunk on cider.

**Amos:** For me, it might have been *The Rock*. It took a while to get to the crazier Nicolas Cage

entries. But that was a good one to start off with, I think.

**John:** It was *Con Air* for me as well. I think somebody at my school kept saying, "Put the bunny back in the basket."

**Helen:** Box.

**Dan:** You put the lotion in the basket and the bunny in the box. It's easy to confuse.

**Helen:** There are eras of Nicolas Cage. It feels like he's establishing himself as a young up-and-comer, there's the cult hero bit, and then post-*Leaving Las Vegas*...

**Nick:** There's the action hero, and then all the years where he's just screaming at people.

**Helen:** What do we call this era now?

**Nick:** *The Age Of Cage*. That didn't mean anything.

**Helen:** I think that works.

**Nick:** He calls it 'Nouveau

Shamanic', or 'Mega-Acting'. He's actually used that phrase.

**John:** It's maximalist acting, isn't it?

**Nick:** It's all the acting.

**John:** Maybe too much? Science gone too far, you can say.

**Amos:** While he's definitely prone to mega-acting, *Pig* is very understated, in a great way. So he's capable of that as well.

**Helen:** He can do that. *Leaving Las Vegas* is quite internal and restrained. He has that in him. He just chooses not to.

**Nick:** *Red Rock West* is one of my favourites and it's very dialled down. He does shout, "Fuck Mexico!" at one point, but other than that he's very restrained. He's great at either end of the scale.

**Dan:** That's something Cage does very well. Tormented men, men out of their depth, men

## OUR CRITICS



**NICK DE SEMLYEN**

Likes to watch *Ghost Rider* while eating jellybeans from a martini glass.



**DAN JOLIN**

His favourite Cage performance is that time he did a forward roll on Wogan.



**JOHN NUGENT**

Will lend you any Cage film, but you can't take his Face/Off.



**HELEN O'HARA**

She knows the A B C D E F G H I of Cage.



**AMOS WARMANN**

Wherever he goes, the wind follows. And the wind smells like rain.





who are caught in a situation spiralling out of control.

**Helen:** He's very good at pathos, angst, frenzy, terror and panic. All of those things run through a lot of his films.

**Amor:** That's what makes him so interesting. He's so unpredictable.

**John:** This is why I think *Mandy* is the ultimate Nic Cage film. It has every dimension of Nic Cage. In the first hour you've got this understated, contemplative, quite sad Nic Cage and then it all goes a bit tits up, and you get him screaming in his tighty whities in a bathroom, chugging vodka. And then he fights with a chainsaw.

**Nick:** He has a chainsaw duel. There's not enough of that in modern cinema.

**Helen:** We had a long debate about whether to include

*Spider-Man: Into the Spider-Verse*. We have come to the conclusion that it is not eligible. *Spider-Verse* is an astonishing film, but you would never describe it as "A Nic Cage Film".

**John:** It is, essentially, a cameo. **Amor:** It's a great cameo, though. It would be in my top one.

**Dan:** In *Red Rock West*, Dwight Yoakam calls Nicolas Cage "Spider-Man", which is a nice little bit of foreshadowing.

**John:** And then in *Kick-Ass* he plays Batman. It's his homage to Adam West. He's so good in that film. He's so funny and sweet and gets an emotional pay-off, and shoots a child point-blank in the chest.

**Nick:** John, shooting children: not good.

**Helen:** Shall we talk about the Holy Trinity of *The Rock*, *Con Air* and *Face/Off*? Made in a fairly short space of time, and immediately transforming him from indie darling to A-list.

**John:** It was directly after he won his Oscar for *Leaving Las Vegas*. Holy shit, they're good. It's such a good run.

**Helen:** For me it's all about *The Rock*. It's got an incredible Nic Cage performance, great chemistry with Sean Connery, all that massively macho Michael Bayness, a script which Tarantino and Aaron Sorkin did script-doctoring on.

**Nick:** It falls down in one area: does Nicolas Cage take his face off? Does he put someone else's face on? I checked, he doesn't.

**Helen:** I love *Face/Off* for showing he's better than John Travolta as a baddie or a goodie.

**John:** *Face/Off* is the most purely enjoyable watch. It's just so insane. It makes me giggle in a way that other films don't.

**Amor:** He's doing the most from minute one in that film.

**Nick:** He did *Vampire's Kiss* early on, where he plays a guy who thinks he's becoming a vampire. That was the film he famously ate a live cockroach for.

**John:** Crazy Method days.

**Dan:** Cage commits. I wouldn't say he's disciplined. That doesn't seem like the right word for him. But he commits. And even if it's shit, he commits. You've got to respect that.

**John:** He was really good at playing hotheads, balls of energy. I really love *Wild At Heart*. There's a scene where he and Laura Dern are driving along and they get out in the desert and do loads of karate kicks and dancing. It's amazing.

**Nick:** It's a shame he didn't do more with David Lynch.

**Helen:** I feel we should talk about *Raising Arizona*.

**Dan:** That's a funny one. It's where we start seeing the Cage of the future. He's being directed by the Coen brothers and their styles didn't match, but the results are fantastic.

**Nick:** He based that performance on Woody The Woodpecker. He just watched Woody Woodpecker cartoons and then did it in live-action.

**Dan:** He's not good at accents, is he? Do you remember *Captain Correlli's Mambo*?

**Helen:** I've blocked it out. But *Adaptation* is great.

**Dan:** I love that. Watch it again — there are entire scenes where it's him and him, the only two people in the room and they're talking over each other. As a performance it's technically amazing. He was, as both Charlie and Donald Kaufman, very lovable and believable.

**Nick:** It's his *Double Impact*, which is the highest honour I can bestow on it.

**John:** That's a film where the screenplay draws attention to itself so much. The screenwriter is the main character, but Cage brings so many dimensions to that performance.

**Dan:** It's by far the best film Nic Cage stars in alongside John Cusack and John Malkovich.

**Helen:** Hey, *Con Air* is so ridiculous and over-the-top that I feel you have to love it.

**Dan:** And yet I don't.

**Helen:** How can you not? You even have his hair from *Con Air*.

**John:** Dan, there's a bit where he gets shot and just keeps walking.

**Dan:** Yes. Bollocks. That and *Face/Off* are high-end tosh, and you can go with it, or it will just annoy you. And they both just annoy me. I know I'm an outlier.

**Amor:** Put the Jolin back in the box.

**Helen:** Right, enough squabbling. Let's vote!

## THE TOP TEN



**THE ROCK** (1996)  
Amor: "It's widely known that Schwarzenegger passed on Stanley Goodspeed. Cage did not. And we're all the better for the unlikely action-movie stardom that followed as a result."



**RAISING ARIZONA** (1987)  
Helen: "Cage channels his manic energy expertly as the hapless H.J. in this Looney-Tunes-esque caper."



**FACE/OFF** (1997)  
Nick: "I could watch Cage talk about eating a peach for hours. Action-movie ecstasy."



**ADAPTATION** (2002)  
Dan: "Two Cages for the price of one, with a twin reined-in-Nic treat as he plays Charlie and Donald Kaufman."



**RED ROCK WEST** (1993)  
Nick: "Little-seen but absolutely dynamite noir, with Cage as a drifter trying to escape a Texan town."



**PIG** (2021)  
Amor: "Cage's raw turn as a truffle-hunter looking for his stolen pig is as unpredictable as it is effective."



**CON AIR** (1997)  
John: "The lesser of Cage's '90s actioners is still a bloody good time: Die Hard-on-a-plane. Vest included."



**MANDY** (2018)  
John: "Both bleak and bonkers, this is my personal number one. Cage fights demon bikers, for goodness' sake!"



**LEAVING LAS VEGAS** (1995)  
Dan: "Pretty shocking that this is so low on the list. It's a tough watch, but Cage has rarely been more human."



**MOONSTRUCK** (1987)  
Helen: "Only Cage would have his biggest romantic hit playing a one-armed, opera-obsessed baker."

# I'd quote that for a dollar

## Writer Ed Neumeier talks us through **ROBOCOP**'s most memorable lines

WITH ITS EXTREME violence, a hokey title that most people balked at, a dark, anti-Reaganite sense of humor, and big sci-fi ambition, it was kind of a miracle *RoboCop* ever got made — let alone became a late-'80s sleeper hit that launched the US career of Dutch director Paul Verhoeven.

Thirty-five years on, it still rocks, something writer Ed Neumeier (a former junior exec at Universal who co-scripted with music-video director Michael Miner) is relieved to hear. "It held up for you?" he says. "That's great!" This is thanks mainly to his and Miner's cracking screenplay — remarkably, their first — which is palpably packed with zingers. So it seems appropriate to ask Neumeier, still good friends with Miner and Verhoeven (with whom he's making another movie, *Young Simon* — their third, after *Starship Troopers*), to talk us through some of the film's most quotable lines...



### "I'D BUY THAT FOR A DOLLAR!"

(BENNY HILL)

*RoboCop*'s most repeated line, from the Benny Hill-esque sketch show watched by the citizens of Old Detroit throughout the movie. "The show was actually called *It's Not My ProMovie*, but that never made it into the film. Benny Hill was definitely an inspiration, as were Monty Python and sitcoms like *Happy Days*; the line was meant to be absurdist and not really mean anything. About ten years after the movie, I was in an elevator and a guy came running up and got in at the last second. He turned to me and said, 'I'd buy that for a dollar!' So I've heard it used in real life once!"



### "YOU HAVE 20 SECONDS TO COMPLY."

(ED-209)

The glitchy proto-Robo's menacing ultimatum (actually delivered by producer Jon Davison) presages the bloody meeting-room death of poor Mr. Kinney (Kevin Page), and was soon after sublimed into popular culture. "I arrived at 20 seconds, because ten wasn't long enough and we needed some time there. Later there was a great rap song called '20 Seconds To Comply' by [British rapper] Silver Bullet [released in late 1989]. That was one of the best things that happened after the movie came out. I would shake that guy's hand if I could meet him."



### "CAN YOU FLY, BOBBY?"

(CLARENCE BODDICKER)

When we first meet bespectacled crime-lord Clarence (Kurtwood Smith) during the car chase, he reveals his villainous flair at the expense of cash-burning crosby Bobby (Freddie Hice). "That was something Paul [Verhoeven] made up on the set. He decided it would be interesting if they picked up a guy and threw him at the [police] car, so we needed a line. It's funny. I ran into Kurtwood after a screening of the 2014 *RoboCop*, and he said, 'None of the bad guys enjoy being bad in that movie.' That was the trick to him as Clarence: he enjoyed it."



### "DEAD OR ALIVE, YOU'RE COMING WITH ME."

(ROBOCOP)

Murphy/RoboCop's (Peter Weller) perp-intimidating catchphrase, which tips off bad goon Emil (Paul McCrane) as to the cyborg's true identity. "That was one of the first lines I ever wrote for *RoboCop*. What's amazing to me is that it's original, because it's a Cowboy Bob line — something somebody would say in a Western or whatever. But I've never found it. I also had a scene where he handcuffs somebody to a car, with the implication that they should cut their own arm off, but then I saw *Mad Max* and thought, 'I can't use that anymore.' And it wasn't really in character..."



Left: Part man, part machine, all cop, etc. — Peter Weller as Murphy/RoboCop in the 1987 cult classic.



#### "DICK, YOU'RE FIRED!" (THE OLD MAN)

When RoboCop is unable to dispense justice to nefarious OCP exec Dick Jones (Ronny Cox), thanks to his fourth directive, Jones' boss (Daniel O'Herlihy) delivers this pithy, crowd-pleasing programming override.

"We were trying to figure out the end of the movie, and one day Jon Davison just said, 'Dick, you're fired!' I went, 'Oh. That's it. It's been in front of me all along!' When RoboCop says, 'Thank you,' [before blasting Jones out of the window] I can't remember if I wrote that or if Peter came up with it. Sometimes Peter would say things that seemed lame at the time, but then they were kind of funny afterwards."



#### "NICE SHOOTIN', SON. WHAT'S YOUR NAME?"/"MURPHY." (THE OLD MAN/ROBOCOP)

The movie's final lines, representing a double triumph for RoboCop: he's done away with the baddies, and he's regained his humanity.

"It was such a silly idea that The Old Man would say, 'Nice shootin', son,' but I knew we needed it badly. Again, the Western lives in this movie. Originally it wasn't how it ended, though. It went to another media break. We saw that Lewis had survived, in the hospital. We saw that Bixby Snyder was now under indictment for sexual harassment — talk about prescient! And we saw a commercial for a pizza parlour called Topless Pizza, where women without clothes on were throwing pizza dough in the air [laughs]. But the audience reaction at the first screening was so strong when Murphy said his name, we all knew: 'That's the end of the movie.' "DAN JOLIN

ROBOCOP © BY GUY ON 20 MARCH 1987 IN AN UNUSUAL WAY



#### "BITCHES, LEAVE."

(CLARENCE BODDICKER)

Clarence's ungentlemanly dictat to the women he finds with Bob Morton (Miguel Ferrer) before murdering him. "That line came out of the vapour, and has become a line that people like quite a lot. I remember when we shot it, the homeowner of the location came up to me with the script in his hand, and said, 'That's not a very nice line. I think you should take it out.' [Laughs] But we didn't. I mean, I don't know if it would have been funnier if he'd said, 'Ladies, would you please leave?' It's really a comment on how Clarence can get away with stuff that other people can't."



#### "NUKEM: GET THEM BEFORE THEY GET YOU!" (NUKEM ADVERT NARRATOR)

In one of the film's many satirical media breaks, we see a 'nuclear' American family playing a 'Butler Brothers' board game that sends a holographic mushroom cloud billowing up from their dining table, to shouts of joy.

"I don't know if Nukem was me, or Michael, or both of us, or whatever, but that was a spontaneous gag we came up with one day. We wrote it and it never changed. That was the way it was born, and that was the way it went out. It worked a lot better than I thought it was going to."

# THE CULT OF KIM NEWMAN

The critic and novelist on this month's weirdest home-entertainment picks

The *Slumber Party Massacre* films (1982-'90) are a unique slasher franchise in that all three were directed and written by an all-female team — a tradition upheld by *Slumber Party Massacre*, a reboot from director Danishka Esterhazy (this month's cult hero) and writer Suzanne Keilly (*Leprechaun Returns*). It sticks to well-worn conventions at the outset as a bubblehead posse virtually beg for trouble by heading out to a cabin by the lake where a driller-killer once rampaged. Then it pulls a hilarious reversal and takes off in wildly different directions. The funniest idea is treating frat guys the most horror films treat women — down to lingering shower scenes and squeaking uselessness in the face of danger.

Ivan Kavanagh's *Son* travels several well-worn roads, reasonably well. Single mother Laura (Andi Matichak) and her son David (Luke David Blumm) live quietly, trying to suppress traumatic memories of a Satanic cult/paedophile ring. In the film's eeriest image, Laura opens her son's door one night and finds his bedroom full of ordinary-looking, silent people... who vanish by the time a cop (Emile Hirsch) shows up. When David starts acting on vampirish-cannibalistic cravings, Laura has to go on the run with him. The monster-slasher business is affecting, though some plot nits and bolts don't quite fit together.

Sarah Pirow's *At Lake* updates that *Hard Candy*/Prisoners abduct-an-abuser premise for the era of social media, as determined teenager Rosie (Sarah Rich) sets out to find and punish



## CULT HERO OF THE MONTH DANISHKA ESTERHAZY

Canadian director Danishka Esterhazy has done a lot of intriguing under-the-radar stuff — films about famous violent incidents (*The Trials of Rosputin*, *I Was Lorena Bobbitt*) and contemporary spins on fairy tales (*Suddenly Ever After*, *H & G*) — but first got serious notice via festival screenings of her claustrophobic, dystopian fable *Level 16* (2018), set in a cruel institution which raises young girls for some sinister purpose. Recently, she's worked on the TV series *SurrealEstate*, about an estate-agents firm specialising in haunted properties, and made two lively, witty, retro-themed horror movies: *Slumber Party Massacre* (see main column) and *The Banana Splits Movie*, which reworks the hallucinogenic 1970s kids' show — imagine the Monkees and the Muppets blended in a telepod — as a darkly hilarious horror story of cute robots run amok.

the internet perv who groomed and slut-shamed her sister into suicide. She lures a likely suspect (Marc Menchaca) into a bomb-shelter and sets out to wreak vigilante justice — but, in the process, has doubts about his degree of guilt and mulls over her own complicity in the tragedy. Menchaca (a Chris Mulkey for the 2020s, also creepy in monster drama *No One Gets Out Alive*) and Rich are excellent, and Pirowek has a feel for small-town backbiting. Nice to see Jeff Wincott, direct-to-video action man of the 1990s, as an unhelpful cop.

It'd be hard to come up with a more generic action-hero character name than 'Jake Hunter'. And as played

by bearded, averagely charismatic hard-boke Paul Sloan, Jake is Reacher and Rambo scrambled together but on the cheap in *Every Last One Of Them*. He's out for revenge on gangsters he holds responsible for his estranged daughter's death, but is upstaged by quality bad-hat brother-and-sister act Jake Weber and Taryn Manning. Richard Dreyfuss pops in for an unlikely cameo as the 'Colonel Trautman' stand-in, possibly because the filmmakers promised him a helicopter ride.

*Castle Falls*, directed by Dolph Lundgren, offers undemanding blue-collar action with a decent (and literal) ticking-clock suspense device. In the 90 minutes before demolition charges are due to go off and reduce a decommissioned hospital to smoking rubble, a prison guard (Lundgren) who needs cash to pay for his daughter's operation, a down-on-his-luck MMA fighter (Scott Adkins) and a ruthless criminal kingpin (Scott Hunter) search for and fight over bags of cash stashed in the building. Given the premise, you can foresee most story beats, but the stars are on form (being slightly less invincible than usual helps) and you get your fill of spin-kicks, falls from upper stories and dolts firing off machine-guns around high explosives.





!  
SPOILER  
WARNING

## THE VIEWING GUIDE

A deep dive into the  
must-see moments from  
the month's big release

### The Electrical Life Of Louis Wain

Will Sharpe's biopic is a stylish, moving account of the life of its title character, a real-life artist whose paintings of cats made him world-famous. Featuring a Benedict Cumberbatch performance the equal of his Oscar-nominated work in *The Power Of The Dog*, its unique blend of whimsy and woe is no surprise to fans of Sharpe's work on the small screen, including *Flowers* and *Landscapers*. Here, he takes us through the film's key moments.

#### RADIO CHATTER

Wain's paintings brought him fame, yet he was troubled by the loss of his wife, severe mental-health issues and an obsession with electricity. Three of those are hinted at in the film's opening, in which the crackle of a radio brings us H.G. Wells' voice, espousing the virtues of Wain's cat

paintings, before we meet an elderly Wain in a care home. Initially, Sharpe didn't want to start at the end. "It's not uncommon to start that way," he says. "But it felt like the most light-handed way of sneaking in the information about his impact on the cat's status in society. And when you hear H.G. Wells later, you hear it in a different way."

#### MEETING EMILY

The first half of the film is an entrancing portrait of the love story between Wain and his wife, Emily (Claire Foy). The two first encounter each other in a classic meet-cute situation, with Emily — hired as the family governess — hiding in a wardrobe. "I don't know exactly what the first encounter would have been," admits Sharpe. "But that felt like a fun way to meet Emily. I wanted them both to have an active role in their relationship, and so we had to have someone to miss, to ache for when she was taken away from us."

#### THE LIVE PAINTING

After Emily is diagnosed with terminal breast cancer, the couple happen upon, and adopt,

a cat that they call Peter. From that point on, Wain starts painting anthropomorphised pictures of cats, which make his name (if not his fortune). But one of the film's most stunning moments comes from another, lesser-known aspect of his painting: his landscapes. As Louis and the dying Emily stand in a pretty wooded glen, Sharpe almost imperceptibly transforms it into one of Wain's psychedelic landscapes, and freezes them there, together. "When you first look at his landscapes, they seem innocently bucolic pictures of the countryside, but the use of colour is quite bizarre in a way," explains Sharpe. "I felt like he must have sat in that place to create such a vivid image of it. I wanted to take the audience to that place with him in some way."

#### A SAD FAREWELL

When the inevitable comes, and Emily dies, the scene is a model of restraint, as Louis brings his wife her morning breakfast and, with just a glance over his shoulder, confirms the worst. "There's something about the fact that he can barely







bringing himself to look at it," says Sharpe. "It sets you up for the story that carries through the rest of the film, where he's trying to suppress grief and run from it." Sharpe admits that they did film a shot of Emily lying dead in bed, but chose not to use it. "There was something about it that felt too heavy-handed. You know what he's seeing."

### CAT SPEAK

Emily's death plunges Wain, and the film, into a very different tonal space, as he battles with grief, poverty, further deaths in his family, and insanity. Even so, Sharpe still strikes a whimsical tone from time to time, most notably in a brief moment where we see some of Wain's cats express their thoughts (their owner is convinced cats will soon speak like humans) via joyful, misspelled subtitles like, "I like jumping!" "There was a version where we could have had talking cats," says Sharpe. "I was very keen for this film not to feel like a fantasy movie or too much like a family film. But as the owner of two cats myself,



you do find yourself having fairly involved conversations with them."

### VISION QUEST

"One thing we always wanted to do was share in Louis Wain's point of view and his psychology," says Sharpe. There's a surreal edge to proceedings from the off, as we are privy to some of Wain's darker visions of drowning, or talking cats. But the second half is very much a tone poem — after another death in the family, Wain has a breakdown, represented visually as a confusing blur that segues into a kaleidoscopic montage. "Those images felt like a window into his soul. It's the beginning of his journey of healing to the end of the film."

### WELLS WELLS WELLS

For a film with a preponderance of cameos (Taika Waititi, Richard Ayoade and Sophia di Martino all make one-scene appearances), Sharpe saves the strangest for last, as we see that H.G. Wells speech being recorded. Who better to play a visionary genius than musician and keen Wain fan,



Nick Cave? "Nick was himself a collector of Louis Wain, and in that spiritual moment it felt like he himself has a love for this person," explains Sharpe. "H.G. Wells was engaged in this campaign to support Louis Wain towards the end of his life, and that was a huge deal. To give the audience a sense of that thrill, we needed to find somebody who would give you that."

### LANDSCAPE'S END

The movie ends with a callback to that moment where Louis and Emily become frozen in one of his landscapes. This time, an elderly Wain goes for a walk and finds himself once again transported to that reassuring, beautiful vista. "He has a speech about how imagining the future is the same as remembering the past," adds Sharpe. "It's like he's with her in that moment. Her presence in that moment is as strong as it was when she was physically there." Electrifying.

CHRIS HEWITT

THE ELECTRIC BLUE OF LOUIS WAIN IS OUT ON 21 MARCH ON DVD, BLU-RAY AND DIGITAL



# THE STORY OF THE SHOT

How iconic  
images came  
to life

## Citizen Kane

FROM ITS FIRST shot — craning over a fence to reveal a spooky mansion — to its last — zeroing in on a furnace to reveal “Rosebud” — *Citizen Kane* is crammed with indelible images. But if you were looking for one shot to stand in for all the brilliance of Orson Welles’ barnstorming 1941 debut, Kane’s electioneering speech at Madison Square Garden might just do the trick. Full of stylistic bravura, cinematic sleight-of-hand, political smarts and a powerhouse of a performance, it is the movie in microcosm.

The 1916 gubernatorial rally comes during the section where Kane’s closest friend, Jed Leland (Joseph Cotten), charts the rise and fall of the newspaper magnate’s political ambitions. The crowd-pleasing address was captured on Stage 7 at RKO studios in Culver City. It starts with a long shot of the Madison Square Garden interior seemingly filled to the brim with a rapt crowd. The image is a testament to the brilliance of optical effects genius Linwood Dunn and matte painter Mario Larrinaga, who had both previously worked on RKO’s *King Kong*. The only live-action element is the stage (with some 30 actors); the mass audience is actually a Larrinaga matte painting, pricked with holes so that light would shine through and create the illusion of motion in the “crowd”.

Following a cheezy dissolve, the shot continues to move in on Kane holding court, with the audience in the palm of his hand. As with many images in *Kane*, the camera is looking up at Welles, investing him with mythic stature — a trick

the filmmaker stole from his directing idol, John Ford.

“I screened [Ford’s] *Stagecoach* every night for a month with someone different from the studio,” recalled Welles, “and then asked questions.” Welles also purloined Ford’s cameraman, Gregg Toland, who elevated Kane (and Kane) to another level. “The greatest gift a young director could ever have is a cameraman who would do anything you ask,” Welles once said. “Anything was possible. He [Toland] never tried to impress me with the fact he was doing impossible things but he was.”

Welles wasn’t just concerned with the visuals, though. Coming from a radio background — his 1938 audio retelling of *The War Of The Worlds* freaked out America — he implored RKO sound technician James G. Stewart to make the rally sound like “Madison Square Garden with 10,000 people in it”. During filming, Welles adopted the manner of speaking in a huge hall, waiting for the echoes to die, but ultimately Stewart re-recorded the speech with Welles orating in a long hallway, adding in applause, laughter and shouts of encouragement. When the mix was finished, Stewart had done his job too well.

“You’re a bigger ham than I am,” Welles barked. “Who’s going to look at me with that sound coming at them? It’s great, but give me half as much.” For once, cinema’s master showman showed a modicum of restraint. **IAN FREER**

**CITIZEN KANE IS OUT NOW ON DVD, BLU-RAY AND DIGITAL**

### INSTANT TRIVIA



1

The outfit on the banner behind Kane is worn by him to confront singing coach Matiste (Fortunio Bonanova).

2

Note Kane’s gold tie-pie. “K” motifs appear throughout the film.

3

Stage 7 at RKO studios also hosted Thatcher’s office, Bernstein’s office, Kane’s breakfast room and Kanadu’s furnace room where “Rosebud” is revealed as...

4

*Citizen Kane* was edited by Robert Wise, director of *West Side Story* (1961), *The Sound Of Music* and *Star Trek: The Motion Picture*.

5

It’s estimated 50 per cent of *Citizen Kane*’s shots involve some sort of special effect.





"The movie in microcosm"  
— Charles Foster Kane  
(Orson Welles) campaigns  
for governor at a rally in  
Madison Square Garden.

## 6 OF THE BEST

PICK OF THE MONTH

Team Empire on the month's essential movies



## PETITE MAMAN

OUT 21 MARCH / CERT U / 73 MINS  
DVD Blu-ray

After the success of *Portrait Of A Lady On Fire*, Céline Sciamma could have done anything. That she chose to go petite, rather than grande, only speaks to her thoughtful sensibilities as a filmmaker. *Petite Maman* is a small film (only 73 minutes long), but such a singular delight. A sweet, gentle fantasy about a young girl meeting her mother at the same age, it is shot naturally and unfussily, yet still finds a sense of magic. Sciamma cited Hayao Miyazaki as a reference point, and the Ghibli-ness of it all seems so obvious on a second watch: the pastoral setting, the whimsical premise, the lack of an antagonist, the matter-of-fact approach to grief and trauma. It's like a live-action *My Neighbour Totoro* — and should be lauded as such. **JOHN NUGENT**



## THE MATRIX RESURRECTIONS

OUT TBC / CERT TBC / 142 MINS  
DVD Blu-ray 4K

It's fitting for a franchise about the disparity between external appearances and internal realities that *The Matrix Resurrections* isn't what it first appears to be. While Lana Wachowski's *fourquel* is dressed in the clothes of its predecessors (literally), it's less an action masterpiece, more a sincere romance, conjuring more emotion in the reunion of Neo (Keanu Reeves) and Trinity (Carrie-Anne Moss) than the first three films combined. Bathed in natural light, it's beautiful in its own right — both a "fuck you" to the studio that demanded its existence, and a reclamation of the first film's distorted pop-cultural legacy. Not the Matrix movie you were expecting, yet a Matrix movie through and through. Maybe that's not so binary, after all. **BEN TRAVIS**



## NIGHTMARE ALLEY

OUT 21 MARCH / CERT 15 / 150 MINS  
DVD Blu-ray

Guillermo del Toro's finest movie since *Pan's Labyrinth* is a meticulously constructed adaptation of William Lindsay Gresham's novel (filmed in 1947 by RKO) about Stanton Carlisle (Bradley Cooper), a drifter-turned-grifter who gets in over his head when he meets a mysterious woman (Cate Blanchett) he can't refuse. It's none more noir, filled with femme fatales and deadbeat men and murder, but del Toro weaves the material into a compelling psychological horror. Beautifully designed and shot, it features phenomenal performances throughout from Cooper, Blanchett and a stellar supporting cast. The last act in particular is achingly beautiful and excruciatingly painful — Del Toro's career in microcosm. **CHRIS HEWITT**



## LAMB

OUT 26 MARCH / CERT 15 / 107 MINS  
DVD Blu-ray

Perhaps it was the lure of Noomi Rapace's second homeland (she spent several of her childhood years in Iceland), or the nature of the eccentric story. Whatever possessed her to gamble on the tale of a childless couple adopting a mysterious newborn — half lamb, half human — they find on their farm, it pays off handsomely, both as a showcase for the actor-executive producer and for audiences willing to tune into its offbeat frequency. Cheekily mis-marketed as a horror film, in truth it's a deadpan comedy-drama and sly eco-parable, less apocalyptic than *Don't Look Up*, but no less impactful. Director Valdimar Jóhannsson — a top-drawer visual effects artist — nails the lamb-child VFX, and Rapace is equally flawless. **DAVID HUGHES**



## ZEROS AND ONES

OUT APRIL 4 / CERT 15 / 86 MINS  
DVD

While Europe was in lockdown, Abel Ferrara sought exceptional permission to film in the suddenly abandoned public places of Rome. In Ferrara style, he didn't make a narrative film about the pandemic but a freeform personal journey in the form of a spy thriller. The near-future setting might qualify as semi-apocalyptic, though it just collages elements of the emptied city with the occasional superimposed explosion. An American military operative (Ethan Hawke) is trapped in a literally murky plot, nagged by a revolutionary twin brother — and a version of the real Hawke tops and tails the long night with probably misleading-to-camera chats. A sketch for a film, but suspenseful, terrifying and enigmatic in equal measures. **KIM NEWMAN**

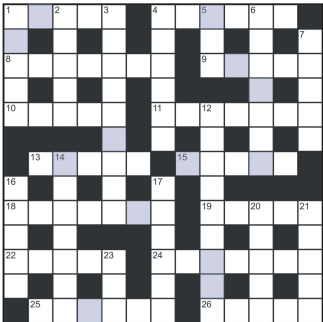


## C'MON C'MON

OUT NOW / CERT 15 / 106 MINS  
DVD Blu-ray

A shaggy sort-of road movie and exquisite family drama meet in this story about an uncle left to mind his nephew for a few days. Joaquín Phoenix, on non-showy but hugely effective form, is the radio-and-podcast-producing adult; Woody Norman, who's extraordinary, his mercurial charge. It feels like director Mike Mills just lets real life happen, but this is a delicately balanced account of building relationships and making commitments. There's the joy of spending time with a happy kid, and the heart-stopping terror of losing a child you're caring for, and everything in-between. Shot in a soft black-and-white, and sprinkled with real kids talking about their hopes and dreams, this is impossibly charming and deeply affecting. **HELEN O'HARA**

# CROSSWORD AND COMPETITION



## ACROSS

- 1 Frank, director of *It Happened One Night* (5)
- 4 Film in which Jay and Silent Bob first appear (5)
- 8 State the name of a Harrison Ford character (7)
- 9 Character featured in *The Seventh Seal* and *Monty Python's The Meaning of Life* (5)
- 10 A motion picture of 40 minutes or less, or Martin (5)
- 11 Nationalist of Eisenstein and Tarkovsky (7)
- 13 "Listen" said one of the taglines of this Alejandro González Iñárritu film (5)
- 15 It describes *People*, *Heart* and *Rich Asians* (5)
- 16 Comic-book hero played by Jennifer Garner (7)
- 19 *My Fair Lady's* Doolittle (5)
- 22 Mickey Rourke's Harry or Simon Pegg's sergeant? (5)
- 24 Nicolas Cage would "like to take this..." (4,3)
- 25 It links Ryan O'Neal and Kylo Ren (6)
- 26 Gene Hackman's Tenenbaum (5)

## DOWN

- 1 Robert Donat's teacher (5)
- 2 Who Napoleon Dynamite says you should vote for (5)
- 3 The —, where Jack Lemmon's managers conduct their affairs (5)
- 4 Could be Danes or Denis (6)
- 5 — *Of Days*, in which Amie fights the Devil (3)
- 6 Zoë, aka Toast The Knowing and Selina Kyle (7)
- 7 What Danny Torrance and David Helfgott do (5)
- 12 It was named *Desire* for Vivien Leigh (5)
- 14 Someone like Captain America or Iron Man (7)
- 16 She was possessed in *The Exorcist* (5)
- 17 Film set's chief electrician in charge of lighting (6)
- 20 James, the partner of Ismail Merchant (5)
- 21 The — *Truth* (Irene Dunne/Cary Grant) (5)
- 23 Tyler, who was in *Stealing Beauty* and *Wildling* (3)

# WIN!

## EDIFIER S8800B SPEAKERS PLUS A PAIR OF NEOBUDS PRO



There's a treat for your ears in Crossword Corner this issue. Because we've got two pieces of audio kit that will enhance your movie and TV-viewing, whether at home or out and about. First up is a set of Edifier S8800B speakers (RRP £259.99) — a classic pair which operate via Bluetooth so have no bulky wires to clutter up your shelves. Boasting studio-sound quality, they're a fine addition to any home cinema set-up. Then, for when you're on the move, we have a pair of Edifier Neobuds Pro (RRP £119.99), featuring innovative acoustic technology that delivers some of the highest fidelity ever achieved by wireless earphones. To be in with a chance of winning, crack the crossword, solve the anagram and follow the instructions below.

THE EDIFIER S8800B SPEAKERS AND NEOBUDS PRO ARE AVAILABLE FROM AMAZON.CO.UK

## COMPETITION ENDS 11 APRIL

**HOW TO ENTER** Take the letters from each coloured square and rearrange them to form the name of an actor, director or character. Visit [www.empireonline.com/crossword](http://www.empireonline.com/crossword) and fill out the form along with your answer in the provided field. Entry is free and closes at midnight on 11 April. Winners are selected at random. See below for terms and conditions.

**APRIL ANSWERS ACROSS:** 1 Cimino, 4 Frog, 8 Carlio, 10 Silva, 11 Luis, 12 Dead Calm, 14 Destrly, 15 Ingrid, 18 Mononoke, 20 Amit, 22 Landro, 23 New Wave, 24 Hush, 25 Atwell. **DOWN:** 1 Cecil B DeMille, 2 Moribus, 3 Noir, 5 Resident, 6 Gilda, 7 I'm as mad as hell, 9 Obey, 13 François, 16 Rampage, 17 Skin, 19 Ninth, 21 SWAT.

## ANAGRAM OSCAR ISAAC

**TERMS AND CONDITIONS:** One entry per person. Entries are free. Entries must be received before 12 April or will not be valid. The Competition is open only to people aged 16 and over who live in the United Kingdom and are not a House employee or their immediate family. One winner will be selected at random from all valid entries. Competition organized by R. Bauer Publishing Ltd (Empire's Employer). Empire's choice of winner is final, and no correspondence will be entered into in this regard. The winner will be notified via email, between seven and ten days after the competition ends. Empire will email the winner a confirmation of their win. If the winner does not respond to the message within 14 days of the competition end, Empire will select another winner at random and the original winner will not win a prize. Empire is not responsible for late delivery or unsatisfactory quality of the prize. Entrants agree to the collection of their personal data in accordance with Empire's privacy policy <http://www.bauermediaentertainment.co.uk/privacy-policy>. Winner's personal details will be given to prize provider for postage/delivery of the prize. Winner reserves the right to amend or cancel these terms or any aspect of the competition (including the prize at any time) if required for reasons beyond its control. Any questions, please email [empire@bauermedia.co.uk](mailto:empire@bauermedia.co.uk). Competitions will not be considered if made more than 30 days after the competition ends. Winner's details available on request after the competition ends by emailing [empire@bauermedia.co.uk](mailto:empire@bauermedia.co.uk). For full T&Cs visit <http://www.bauermedia.co.uk/competition-terms-and-conditions>.



## CLASSIC SCENE

Standout sequences from the great movies



# Eternal Sunshine Of The Spotless Mind

Chosen by **ANNA BODEN**

**Anna Boden:** "Mine is Jim Carrey diving into memories as he's trying to run away from the machine and hide with Kate Winslet in *Eternal Sunshine Of The Spotless Mind*. That whole sequence, with the oversized kitchen table, is just so memorable. It was heavily inspirational for *Captain Marvel*."

### INT. LIVING ROOM — DAY

Joel [Jim Carrey] and Clementine [Kate Winslet] are sitting on a sofa. It's raining outside.

**CLEMENTINE:** Joel?

**JOEL:** Hmm-hmm?

**CLEMENTINE:** I have another idea for this problem. This is a memory of me. The way you wanted to have sex on the couch after you looked down at my crotch—

**JOEL:** [Eyes widening after doing just that] What?

**CLEMENTINE:** Joel, the eraser guys are coming here, so... what if you take me somewhere else? Somewhere where I don't belong, and we hide there 'til morning?

Joel thinks.

**JOEL:** Oh, man. I can't remember anything without you.

**CLEMENTINE:** That's very sweet, but try. Okay?

**JOEL:** Okay.

We hear a young boy singing "Row Row Row Your Boat". A slight smile crosses his face. Clementine joins in. We see a child's bike outside a house. And then, inside, it begins to rain on Joel and Clementine.

On the sofa, Joel begins to sing "Row Row Row Your Boat". A slight smile crosses his face. Clementine joins in. We see a child's bike outside a house. And then, inside, it begins to rain on Joel and Clementine.

**CLEMENTINE:** It's working! Ingenious!

We track across to the same bike, but now it's inside. Then we see young Joel wiping it down, outside. Inside, a laughing adult Joel dives under his tiny kitchen table. Young Joel, outside, opens

his mouth to taste rain on his tongue. Adult Joel, under the table, holds out his hand to feel the rain. Then young Joel runs and dives...

Under the kitchen table in his childhood home.

Back in the living room, we see adult Joel has vanished. Clementine — with a book on her head to stay dry — is worried.

**CLEMENTINE:** Joel? Joel? Where'd you go?

### INT. KITCHEN — DAY

In the brightly lit, dry kitchen of his childhood, adult Joel is under a huge kitchen table, playing with a yo-yo and dressed in kids' pajamas.

**CLEMENTINE:** I'm supposed to come too!

Adult Joel, under the table, hears the voice of his mother, talking to an unseen woman.

**JOEL'S MOTHER:** Listen, I'm

just going to go get a salad bowl. Can you stir the soup and can you keep an eye on Joel? He just likes to be near me.

**UNSEEN WOMAN:** Of course.

**JOEL'S MOTHER:** Absolutely!

**UNSEEN WOMAN:** It worked! My God!

We see that Clementine is the unseen woman, in a '60s dress with a cigarette in her hand.

**CLEMENTINE:** Look at this! Woah! It worked! Look at this dress, man! Oh my God, look at it! I wish I could take it with me.

Joel peeks out from under the table. Clementine bends down.

**CLEMENTINE:** Who am I?

**JOEL:** Mrs. Hamlin.

**CLEMENTINE:** Right! Mrs. Hamlin!

**JOEL:** I must be about four. Oh my god!

RESISTANCE  
IS  
FUTILE

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A close-up, high-contrast photograph of a woman's face, specifically her right eye and hand. She has light-colored eyes and is looking directly at the camera. Her hand is holding a small, clear glass vial with a red liquid inside, positioned near her eye. The lighting is dramatic, highlighting the textures of her skin and the liquid in the vial.

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